

Editorial

The imminent demise of the church in Scotland is increasingly commented on by press and media. A recent editorial in *The Herald* (28 September, 1995), and a major article in *The Scotsman* (5 October, 1995) both deplored the state of the church in Scotland, both cast scorn on her attempts to be relevant in an increasingly technological age and both asserted she is in her death pangs.

It cannot be insignificant that two days after *The Scotsman* article just referred to, the *Weekend Scotsman* magazine launched a series entitled 'A Wicked Guide to The Seven Deadly Sins', which are described as being 'for most people, compatible with life towards the end of the millennium'. Modesty forbids listing the titles of articles on the first deadly sin, 'Lust', which were offered to the Saturday readership for 7 October. Enough to say the editorial staff clearly consider that a dying church can no longer stand guardian over the nation's moral

life. The reasoning seems to be clear and logical: if the church is expiring, then sin can now come into its own: the nation can please itself and her people at last enjoy with impunity the forbidden fruits of violating the laws of God.

We do not for one moment propose to attempt any prophecy about the future of nations that abandon God and his commandments. Such warnings would go unheeded anyway. Time will prove the point. People have a remarkable facility for amnesia. We quickly forget the solemn warnings of history. Civilisations have risen and fallen, and their rise and fall has always had an inseparable link with the moral licence exhibited in their public and private living.

Scorn for the Bible

Apparently the church finds it impossible to learn the lesson of the lemming. Our leaders seem to have their own built-in self-destruct

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instinct. Let me cite two or three examples of what I mean. One came to me personally from a first year student in one of the Scottish theological faculties. As the new intake of candidates for the ministry sat ready to begin their study of the sacred Book, the first words the Old Testament Professor spoke were: 'Ladies and gentlemen, get out of your little minds here and now any absurd idea that the Old Testament is any way a special book. We just happen to be studying some old documents originally written in Hebrew. We might as well be studying a modern novel. Understand and accept that from the start.'

In another Scottish theological faculty, the New Testament Professor introduced a series of lectures on the *Letter to the Hebrews* by assuring the students that this was most certainly not a book about Jesus. I say, 'about Jesus' advisedly, because in that same faculty, a young student was castigated by his lecturer for daring to refer to the human Jesus as 'the Christ'. 'Who are you', the tutor demanded, 'to call Jesus "the Christ"? By what authority do you attribute such a title to a wandering Galilean joiner turned teacher?'

The mystique which seems to attach to liberal academics certainly overawes those who presently are tinkering with the training programme for the Ministry of Word and Sacraments. The hope appears to be that if the methodology of preparation for the ministry is juggled about a little we will produce ministers who will be able to salvage a dying kirk. But don't dare ask for Christian teaching to exhibit any reverence for Scripture by those engaged in training ministers. Their theories (many of which come and go much the same as hem lines) are sacrosanct. Note also that the Word of God is not sacrosanct: it can apparently be ravaged and pillaged as much as any 'academic' chooses.

Hearts aflame

It is far too simplistic to beat an evangelical drum and say that if only ministers preached the Word, the tide

would turn and church and nation be saved. The disturbing question is asked in one article in this journal whether evangelicals (who are supposed to be identified by their preaching of the Word) are 'in danger of turning out a generation of dull, predictable, even boring Bible teachers?'

I recently sat one Sunday morning in an Edinburgh church where the opening praise was from Psalm 72 sung to the tune Effingham:

His name for ever shall endure;

Last like the sun it shall:

*Men shall be blessed in him, and
blessed*

All nations shall him call.

I confess I was deeply moved and found my face wet with tears. I thought of the scores of virtually empty church buildings across Scotland's capital, of the supermarkets on that Lord's Day packed with shoppers and of the playparks full of children growing up more ignorant of the Christian faith than those in lands to which we once sent missionaries.

My work involves me worshipping in many congregations of different denominations. Yes, there are a few growing fellowships. But if one is honest and realistic, more of our faces ought to be wet with tears Sunday by Sunday.

It is not that we do not believe that God will yet build his church and gather in his people. Rather it is that we have witnessed, and continue to witness, over the space of a few short decades, the demise of so many churches in Scotland until it is true of our land that we have become the black spot of the whole world for church decline. In no other country on earth are the churches faring so badly as they are in Scotland.

There is an Old Testament word, 'burden'. Sometimes the modern translations render it 'oracle'. It means 'a heavy load imposed by a master which the bearer has no choice but to carry'. The prophets carried a burden on their hearts and souls. The old fashioned way of expressing it was that they had a passion for God. Their hearts were aflame for his glory.

The Word ablaze

I can't imagine a preacher who carries a burden of jealousy for the Lord of Hosts ever being dull, predictable or boring in the pulpit. Nor can I imagine preachers whose hearts are on fire with love for Jesus Christ ever offering their people dry crusts of unapplied theology.

I come back to a theme I have tried to expand on several times in the pages of this journal. Preaching must never only be explanation of a text or passage. Sermons must have at the very least 50% *application* and 10% *appeal*—burning application and passionate appeal! Unless and until our hearts are on fire with passion for God, we preachers run the risk of becoming so bogged down with committee work and (the wrong kind of) pastoral gadding about that in our pulpits we will be dull, predictable and even boring.

Survival

One would have thought that, at the very meanest level, the desire to survive would drive ministers to their knees. But it does not seem to work that way. Our modern affluence, for all we protest we are hard-up, lulls us into a state of false security. Our pay cheques are still transferred into our accounts month by month. The modern way of life with so much gadgetry and hard/software seems to numb our spiritual senses and cloud our vision to the appalling state of an ever increasing number of congregations.

When I asked one minister who was being very pompous over a matter of no consequence where his congregation would be in ten year's time (the answer staring him in the face was that it would be extinct), he changed the subject abruptly and put the question right out of his mind.

One would have thought the prospect of disaster would have put at least a little fire into preachers' bones. It doesn't seem to work that way. Dull, predictable, even boring sermons are still being heard in too many evangelical pulpits. For all our protests

about the state of the churches, we seem to have failed to realise that as she finally sinks slowly beneath the waves of modernity, we will be on the deck saluting bravely as we go down with her.

An elusive formula

There is a formula for thriving congregations. However, it must be acknowledged that as well as passionate hearts ablaze for God, there are also many other factors of which we will want to write in another issue of this journal. They include a wise, thoughtful appraisal by minister and elders of each parish—needs, opportunities, challenges and people. They include some common-sense imagination (not a contradiction in terms!). They include leadership which can and does inspire and is able not only to inaugurate new initiatives for evangelism but also to keep the congregation together and attain the goals agreed on. But above all, they include prayer: prayer that lays hold on God as Jacob did and refuses to let go until the blessing comes; prayer that wrestles and weeps, yet approaches the throne of grace with confident boldness; prayer that revives the discouraged heart and lifts up the disconsolate spirit; prayer that communes face to face with the Lord of glory.

No denomination carries a guarantee of survival. We know the gates of death will not prevail against Christ's church. But we also know that God is able to raise up a new church from the stones, dust and ruins of what he has discarded in judgement. May God grant us reverent fear—the beginning of wisdom—and a holy resolve to serve him with every ounce of our strength. May he be pleased graciously to bless his people and revive his work in the Scotland so many assume now to have become a pagan land.

Preaching

Evangelistic Preaching & the Preacher

John Blanchard

Let me begin with a question. As we near the end of 1995, how many people to the best of your knowledge have been genuinely converted to Christ as a direct result of your ministry during the past twelve months? I would suggest that for many the answer is almost none. If that is not so then I rejoice, but if that is the case what can we do about it? There is a sense in which we can do nothing, in that there is no magic formula anyone can offer us. It is not a question of brushing up our homiletics or preaching in a different style. When we have done everything, the fact of the matter is that it amounts to nothing, unless it is energised by the breath of the Holy Spirit. 'Unless the Lord builds the house its builders labour in vain'.

The Preacher

In his booklet 'What's Wrong with Preaching Today?' Al Martin says, 'I would suggest that all failures in preaching today are the failure either of the man who preaches or of the message he preaches'. It is difficult not to agree with him. In this article, I can only deal with the matter of the preacher.

In Acts 20:28, Paul says to the

Ephesian elders, 'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers'. He doesn't say they are to watch over themselves only, or merely to watch over the flock, but both. More importantly notice the order: 'Keep watch over *yourselves* and over all the *flock*'. Then in 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul writes to a young pastor, 'Watch your life and your doctrine closely'. Again, not one or the other but both and in the same order, 'Watch your *life* and your *doctrine*'. The temptation when looking for areas where improvement might be made is to look at the *work* or the *word*, the *flock* or the *doctrine*. Paul says first we must give attention to *ourselves*. The first priority is the preacher's life. In other words, what we are as Christians is more important than what we are as preachers.

Someone has said that the art of preaching is not making and delivering a *sermon* but making and delivering a *preacher*. Paul Cook says of the New Testament preachers, 'Their calling was so total that they became their message. John the Baptist *was* the message in every fibre of his being—the way he dressed, what he ate, where he lived—it was all part of his message of repent-

ance.' What kind of preachers ought we to be? (2 Pet. 3:11) I want to approach the question along the avenue of one word, which is related directly to our preaching—the word 'passion'.

Preachers of passion

There has never been a great preacher who was not a preacher with passion.

in the eyes of some we prosper—but we know there is no receptive and absorbing communion with God

One can presumably be a great lecturer without passion or a great teacher without passion. I cannot remember any of my school teachers displaying passion, unless it was apoplexy at my apathy, but preaching is of a different order. It is possible to be correct but cold, faultlessly frozen, meticulously mummified! But that is not preaching.

Let me establish the point as it relates to the impact of our preaching. Some of you will know the story of the preacher who asked the nineteenth century English actor William Macready, 'Why do you draw such crowds when you are talking fiction and I get so few to listen to me when I am preaching fact?' To which Macready answered, 'Because you preach fact as if it were fiction and I present fiction as if it were fact.' Campbell Morgan said that half the sermons of his day were failing 'because they lacked the note of passion'. Samuel Chadwick the great Methodist preacher said, 'Men ablaze are invincible, hell trembles when men kindle'. Martyn Lloyd-Jones agreed: 'Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire'.

Remember that passion has nothing to do with decibels, nor with the (apocryphal) note in the margin of a preacher's sermon, 'Shout here, argument very weak'. Rather, it has to do with the fabric of the preacher's *life*. A minister's life is the life of his ministry, or as James Stewart put it, 'The inner

man makes the preacher', and that inner man must be a man of passion.

A Passion for God

Firstly, the preacher must have *a passion for God*. I recall years ago a missionary coming to my own home church in the Channel Islands. He showed a slide of people walking and riding across a dried-up river bed, but above them

was an apparently sound bridge. The question he posed was, 'Why are these people walking across the river bed when there is a bridge over their heads?' The answer was that when the river evaporated in a drought, the timbers of the bridge became dried, cracked and unusable.

Unusable

It is possible for us to be faultlessly in position after years of service. Outwardly everything looks fine but the fabric is dry and we are unusable because we are not moistened by the running water of communion with God. The demands, disciplines, and (I am going to dare to say) drudgery of the ministry will leave us weary and wasted unless we maintain that communion. The one who does is 'like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither' (Ps. 1:3). To change the meta-phor, D.L. Moody once said, 'I am a leaky vessel and I need to keep under the tap'.

Is that what is missing? Think of the words to the church in Ephesus:

'I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my

name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love.'

Here was a church that was faultless in its doctrine, flawless in its diligence but was a failure in its devotion. Is it possible that as ministers of the Word we have lost our first love? Are there times we cry out with the hymn-writer,

'Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord?

Where is that soul refreshing view of Jesus and his word?'

Communion with God

There can be no passion for God without communion with God. Is that a major reason for the dearth of blessing through our preaching? Not a matter of technique, style or theology but that we fail to take time to be alone with God. To put it simply, we spend too much time preparing our sermons and not enough time preparing ourselves. Andrew Bonar once said, 'One of the gravest perils that besets the ministry is a restless scattering of energies over an amazing multiplicity of interests which leaves no margin of time for'—and here are words to which I will return—'receptive and absorbing communion with God'. Can we dare brush that aside as being too basic? What about our devotional lives? The apostles resolved to 'give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word' (Acts 6:4). Do we have the same determined priorities?

The barrenness of a busy life

There are two things which compound our problem and turn it into a tragedy. Firstly, the more outwardly successful we become the greater the danger that we neglect Bonar's 'receptive and absorbing communion with God'. Well known, with a great diversity of interests at home and abroad, Bonar himself had 'arrived' when he wrote those words. He knew the perils of popularity and of a multiplicity of interests and responsibilities. Yet he spoke of the dangers of neglecting 'receptive and absorbing

communion with God'. As a colleague said to me years ago, 'Beware the barrenness of a busy life'.

Complacency

Secondly, the further we seem to go on in the ministry the less it seems to matter. Are there not times when we feel empty and dry and it really doesn't seem to make much difference as far as the ministry is concerned? We survive—in the eyes of some we even prosper—but we know there is no 'receptive and absorbing communion with God'. Or if there has been, it is little more than a flickering pilot light.

If we were called on to deliver a sermon at short notice, we could stand up in 15 minutes time and preach perfectly acceptably without a moment of prayer! I confess I have known times when there have been encouraging results through my ministry and yet I knew of no particular prayer to explain or produce it. The danger is therefore to think that none is needed. This is the beginning of a vicious downward spiral. In some surveys taken among ministers, only a small proportion testify to devotional lives of any significance.

The preacher's devotional life

I am not suggesting that all that we need is to increase the time of our private devotions from fifteen to thirty minutes, or even an hour. Prayer could merely turn into a longer shopping list. Think of the opening of Psalm 42: 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I go and meet with God?' Or think of Psalm 63, where the same longings and aspirations are expressed: 'O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land' (cf Ps. 143:6). The Psalmist's longing was not merely for God's help or guidance or blessing but for God Himself! 'I seek for You, the living God...my soul and body long for You!' This is not the language of the shopper but the lover. As Matthew Henry puts it, 'Living souls can never

take up their rest anywhere short of a living God'.

I hardly need stress the relevance of this to the impact of our preaching. In Spurgeon's words, 'A burning heart will find for itself a flaming tongue'. When Andrew Fuller's friend John Sutcliffe lay dying at Olney in 1814, he said, 'I wish I had prayed more'. Fuller reflected on that. 'I have been thinking of what brother Sutcliffe said to me a few days before his death, "I wish I had prayed more"'. So I wished that I had prayed more. I do not suppose that brother Sutcliffe meant that he wished he had prayed more frequently but more spiritually. I wish I had prayed more for the assistance of the Holy Spirit in studying and preaching my sermons. I might have seen more of the blessing of God attending my ministry'. These words were spoken by one of the greatest original theologians among 18th Century Baptists, a man who was a tremendous catalyst for evangelistic and missionary endeavour.

The Scriptures

There is also the matter of our attention to the scriptures. We may feel at this point less conviction because we are always in the Word; that is our business. But why are we in the Word? Is it not mainly that we are shopping for sermons? For too many the Bible

sanctified by the living Word of God that we will minister to others.

Meditation

'Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long' (Ps 119:97; see also verses 47, 72, 98f. etc.) Notice the word 'meditation'. Reading without meditation is pointless, meditation without reading is perilous, reading and meditation together are precious. The Psalmist was caught up in a virtuous circle: the more he loved the more he meditated, the more he meditated the more he loved! How long should we meditate? Thomas Watson on being asked that replied with a question of his own: 'How long should a man who is cold stand in front of the fire?' When the reply came, 'Until he is thoroughly warmed and ready for his work', Watson answered, 'Then you have the answer to your question'.

Meditation is not the same as study. William Bridge said, 'A man may think on God every day and meditate on God no day'. Study involves the *mind*, meditation engages the *heart* and therefore the *life*. The spin off is the impact on the ministry; it produces preaching that is personal, intimate, confessional, fresh, real and felt. As Bunyan said: 'I preached what I did feel, what I smartingly did feel'.

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has become a text book instead of what one of the Puritans called 'a love letter from God to the believer'.

Taking the issue of obedience for granted, our study of the Word must be done for the good of our souls and not primarily for—though not excluding—the good of others. There is a straight line between reading and absorbing the scriptures for the good of our souls and the impact of our ministry. It is as we ourselves are fed, illumined, encouraged, rebuked, convicted, challenged, strengthened and

Hyper-intellectualism

Geoff Thomas writes: 'One of the great perils that face preachers of the reformed faith is the problem of hyper-intellectualism, that is the constant danger of lapsing into a purely cerebral form of proclamation which falls exclusively upon the intellect. Men become obsessed with doctrine and end up as brain-oriented preachers. There is consequently a fearful impoverishment in their hearts—emotionally, devotionally and practically'. To which I would add that if our preach-

ing's secondary channel is the mind then the danger is that we leave many people untouched. We will have a congregation of *listeners* instead of a congregation of *hearers* and there is a big difference between the two.

If our preaching is primarily cerebral it could depress many who will say, 'I really don't know what he is talking about most of the time. I must be a second class citizen'. Listen to C.S. Lewis: 'Jesus never played the philosopher with a washerwoman'. If our preaching comes from the heart it will be confessional, experimental, understandable and useful. In the 1877 Yale lectures on preaching, Phillips Brooks gave his famous definition of preaching 'as truth through personality'. In the same lecture he spoke of 'a message which we cannot transmit until it has entered into our own experience and we can give our own testimony of its power'.

So the preacher must first and foremost have a passion for God.

A Passion for Holiness

Let me get back to our texts, 'Keep watch over yourselves', and, 'Watch your life'. In *The Reformed Pastor*, Baxter says, 'We study hard to preach exactly and study little or not at all how to live exactly. All the week is little enough to study how to speak two hours. Yet one hour seems too much to study how to live all the week. We must study as hard how to live well, as how to preach well, how to compose our lives as well as our sermons'. A little earlier he says, 'If it be not your daily business to study your own heart and to subdue corruption and to walk with God, if you make not this a work to which you constantly attend, all will go wrong and you will starve your hearers'.

The call to holiness is not one of course that comes exclusively to preachers. Matthew Henry once said, "'Be ye holy", is the great and fundamental law of our religion'. We are to have a passion for holiness not because we are preachers but because we are Christians. The issue is one of obedience not

usefulness.

I recall discussing with a minister another preacher who sadly after an apparently very useful ministry had fallen into sin, recovered and then fallen again. When my friend said, 'It is amazing that God uses that man at all', I replied, 'No, it is amazing that God uses *any* of us'. Yet there is a terrible danger that the impact of our preaching will be negated by the quality of our lives: it will eventually show in our eyes, gestures, voices, attitudes, and body language. John Owen says, 'If a man teach uprightly and walk crookedly, more will fall down in the night of his life than he built in the day of his doctrine'.

Notice how Paul dares to invite his readers to examine his life: 'I urge you to imitate me' (1 Cor. 4:16. See also 1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9). Compare his equally daring statement: 'You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, and righteous and blameless we were among you who believed' (1 Thes. 2:10). His life was an open book. He said, 'You are witnesses...', you can see the way I have lived, my life is an open book to you. You can see it and so can God—the God who sees what other people can't see, who searches the motives and desires of our hearts.

Paul is not here claiming perfection, he is claiming sincerity. He practised

as often as possible the phrase 'I believe'. That may seem a strange thing to say, but the reason is that what *I believe* is neither here nor there. It is what *God says* that is all important. Therefore I rather try to say, 'This is what God says', or, 'This is what is written in His book'.

Consistency of life

There are two further aspects of personal holiness which relate to the impact of our preaching. The first is consistency. There may be few things that deaden the impact of our evangelistic preaching more than inconsistency. If we are one thing in the pulpit and another out of the pulpit the people will believe the other. We are to be the credentials of our creed. In Thomas Brooks' words, 'The man that is really holy will be holy among the holy and he will be holy among the unholy'. He will be as holy in the shop, on the factory floor, in the home, on the golf course or at the squash club as he is in the pulpit, elders' meeting, or prayer meeting.

Of course this speaks not only to the issue of *impact* but also to that of *relevance*. How do we react under pressure, to tragic family news, to sickness? How do we respond to economic crisis, the needs of others, the situation of our neighbours? What

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what he preached. Can we dare to say with Paul, 'Join with others in following my example'? We certainly should not hesitate to say, 'Do whatever you have heard me say'. We should have no compunction about saying that. Can we dare to add, 'and do what you have seen me do'?

One of the glories of preaching is that we don't have to give our opinion about anything. I have tried over the last half of my public ministry to avoid

television programmes do we watch and what magazines and books and papers do we read? These are very practical matters. People observe us; they are watching us. They read us more closely than they read their Bibles. If I were to single out one thing from all that it would be the home. Charles Bridges says, 'If the parsonage does not show the *pattern* as well as the *doctrine*, exhortations from thence will only excite the ridicule of the ungodly

and confirm them in their habits of sin'.

Humility

Secondly, not only consistency but humility. There is a case for saying that the four greatest occupational hazards of the ministry are pride, sex, money and discouragement, and that the greatest of these is pride. Pride is as

A Passion for Souls

Thirdly, we need *a passion for souls*. The phrase is so seldom used today that it sounds antiquarian and the more the pity. Surely it is a vital ingredient in the life of the preacher of the Gospel? There is a sense of course in which it is true of issues other than preaching. I remember years ago seeing on television one of our leading politicians

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ridiculous as it is ubiquitous. James Stewart writes, 'Nowhere surely are pride and self-importance and conscious striving after effect more incongruous and unpardonable than in the servant of the cross'.

Is there any sin in scripture that is pointed out more frequently as being obnoxious in the sight of God than pride? Is it because pride de-deifies God; it unthrones Him? In *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, William Law says that to serve Christ self-importantly is to be a thief and a liar: 'It has the guilt of stealing as it gives to ourselves those things that belong only to God and it has the guilt of lying as it is denying the truth of our state and the pretence we are something that we are not'.

Again notice the relevance of this in the matter of impact. Pride usually has a high profile. It can often be seen in the matter of words and gestures. Pride (or its essence) does not go unnoticed. What then is the effect when we preach? James Stewart says that three things should humble us: 'the magnitude of our task, our own unworthiness to engage in that task and the fact that any blessing from our engaging in that task belongs to God and to God alone'. 'Through God's mercy we have this ministry.... What do you have that you did not receive?' (1 Cor. 4:1,7). In Robert Murray McChesney's words, 'There is no argument like a holy life'.

being asked why he wanted to be in power and he said, 'To see things changed'. How much more should that be the desire and the passion of the preacher!

James Stewart again: 'The servant of the Evangel more than anyone else, more than a scientist, artist, composer or man of affairs must be possessed heart and soul by the momentous enterprise that has laid its compulsion upon him'. Let me flesh that out in two ways.

The salvation of the lost

We should have a passion first of all for the salvation of the lost. It may be that the greatest statement that we have of this in the New Testament is where Paul says, 'For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers those of my own race, the people of Israel' (Rom. 9:3). Paul writes those words in the same breath as his matchless peroration at the end of Romans 8: 'For I am convinced...nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' 'Nevertheless', he says, 'I would be willing to be cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people'. Romans 8 tells us that could not happen. But Paul is saying, 'But if that were the only way in which these people could be saved, if that which is unthinkable and impossible in the

economy of God nevertheless was the only way in which these people could be saved then I would be willing for that appalling fate to be mine'.

One thinks again of a lady saying of McChesney's preaching, 'He preached as if he was dying almost to have you converted'. Paul's concern is reiterated at the beginning of Romans 10: 'Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved'.

Notice that the salvation of the lost was not merely Paul's prayer—it was the passionate desire of his heart. It was said that George Whitefield wept in the course of nearly every sermon, broken with concern that for some of his hearers it might be their last opportunity to hear the Gospel. Do we have the same concern?

The sanctification of the saved

Again, Paul is a moving example: 'My dear children...I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you' (Gal. 4:19). He had already gone through the pains of childbirth in bringing them to faith. Now he was agonising all over again, agonising that they might grow in grace and become mature in Christ.

Do we have the same personal, pastoral, genuine, unjudging passion for the spiritual wellbeing, progress and prosperity of those God has placed in our charge? And if not, why not? I leave you with that question to answer to your Lord and Master before whom we will stand to give an account of our lives and ministries on the last Day.

(The above article has been taken from John Blanchard's first address to ministers during Rutherford House week. The full, much longer address, is available on cassette from RH)

John Blanchard is an internationally known evangelist. He has written numerous best selling books, including 'Ultimate Questions', 'Truth for Life', 'Whatever happened to Hell?' and 'Will the real Jesus please stand up?'

Historical Sermons

The Method of Grace

a sermon by George Whitefield

As God can send a nation of people no greater blessing than to give them faithful, sincere, upright ministers, so the greatest curse that God can possibly send upon a people in this world is to give them over to blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, unskilful guides. And yet, in all ages, we find that there have been many wolves in sheep's clothing, many that daubed with untempered mortar, that prophesied smoother things than God did allow. As it was formerly, so it is now; there are many that corrupt the Word of God and deal deceitfully with it.

It was so in a special manner in the prophet Jeremiah's time. He, faithful to his Lord, did not fail from time to time to speak against them, and to bear a noble testimony to the honour of that God in whose name he spoke. If you read his prophecy, you will find that none spoke more against such ministers than Jeremiah, and here especially in the chapter out of which the text is taken. He charges them with several crimes; particularly with covetousness: For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest, every one dealeth falsely (v.13).

And then, in the words of the text, in a more special manner, he exemplifies how they had dealt falsely and had behaved treacherously. Says he, 'They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, "Peace, peace", when there is no

They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying 'Peace, peace', when there is no peace (Jer. 6:14)

peace'. The prophet, in the name of God, had been telling them that their house should be left desolate, that the Lord would certainly visit the land with war (v.11).

The prophet gives a thundering message, that they might be terrified and have some inclinations to repent. But it seems that the false prophets and priests went about stifling people's convictions, and when they were hurt or a little terrified, they were for plastering over the wound, telling them that Jeremiah was but an enthusiastic preacher, that there could be no such thing as war among them, and saying to people, "Peace, peace, be still", when there was no peace.

No inward peace

These words have also a reference to the soul, and are to be referred to those false teachers who, when people are under conviction of sin and beginning to look towards heaven, are for stifling their convictions and telling them they are already good enough. Indeed, people often love to have it so. Our hearts are exceedingly deceitful and desperately wicked; none but the eternal God knows how treacherous they are.

How many of us cry, 'Peace, peace', to our souls, when there is no peace! How many are now settled upon their lees, thinking they are Christians, flattering themselves they have an interest in Jesus Christ! Whereas if we come to examine their experiences we shall find that their peace is but a peace of the devil's making—it is not of God's giving—it is not that peace that passeth human understanding.

It is a matter, therefore, of great importance to know whether we may speak peace to our hearts. We all long for peace. Peace is an unspeakable blessing. How can we live without peace? Therefore, people from time to time must be taught how far they must go and what must be wrought in them before they can speak peace to their hearts. I must deliver my soul. I must be free from the blood of all those to whom I preach. I must not fail to declare the whole counsel of God. Therefore I shall endeavour to show you what must be wrought in you before you can speak peace to your hearts. But before I come to this, give me leave to premise a caution or two.

Religion an inward work

The first is, that I take it for granted you believe religion to be an inward thing, a work in the heart, wrought in the soul by the power of the Spirit of God. If you do not believe this, though you have got your Bibles in your hand, you hate the Lord Jesus Christ in your heart; for religion is everywhere represented in Scripture as the work of God

in the heart. The kingdom of God is within us, says our Lord; and, he is not a Christian who is one outwardly; but he is a Christian who is one inwardly. If any of you place religion in outward things, I shall not please you; you will not understand me when I speak of the work of God in a poor sinner's heart.

Further, I would by no means confine God to one way of acting. I would not say that all persons, before they come to have a settled peace in their hearts, are obliged to undergo the same degrees of conviction. No. God has various ways of bringing his children home; his sacred Spirit bloweth when, and where, and how it listeth. But I will venture to affirm this: that before ever you can speak peace to your heart, whether by shorter or longer continuance of your convictions, whether in a more pungent or in a more gentle way, you must undergo what I shall hereafter lay down.

Conviction of actual sins

First, then, before you can speak peace to your hearts, you must be made to see, to feel, to weep over, your actual transgressions against the law of God. The soul that sinneth it shall die. Cursed is that man, be he what or who he may, who continues not in all things written in the law to do them.

We are not only to do some things in the law, but we are to do all things, and we are to continue so to do. The least deviation from the moral law, whether in thought, word, or deed, deserves eternal death at the hand of God. If one evil thought, evil word, or evil action deserves eternal damnation, how many hells, my friends, do every one of us deserve whose whole lives have been one continued rebellion against God! Before ever, therefore, we can speak peace to our hearts, we must be brought to see and believe what a dreadful thing it is to depart from the living God.

My dear friends, examine your hearts, for I hope you came here with a design to have your souls made better. Give me leave to ask you, in the presence of God, whether you know the time, or if you do not know ex-

actly the time, do you know there was a time when God wrote bitter things against you and the arrows of the Almighty were within you? Was ever the remembrance of your sins grievous to you? Was the burden of your sins intolerable to your thoughts? Did you ever see that God's wrath might justly fall upon you, on account of your transgressions against God? Could you ever say, 'My sins are gone over my head as a burden too heavy for me to bear?' Did ever any such thing as this pass between God and your soul? If not, for Jesus Christ's sake, do not call yourselves Christians. You may speak peace to your hearts, but there is no peace. May the Lord awaken you, convert you and give you peace, if it be his will, before you go home!

Our original corruption

Further, you may be convinced of your actual sins, so as to be made to tremble, and yet you still may be strangers to Jesus Christ and have no true work of grace upon your hearts. Before ever, therefore, you can speak peace to your hearts, conviction must go deeper. You must not only be convinced of your actual transgressions against the law of God, but likewise of the foundation of all your transgressions. And what is that? I mean that original corruption each of us brings into the world with us, which renders us liable to God's wrath and damnation.

There are many poor souls that think themselves fine reasoners, yet they pretend to say there is no such thing as original sin. They will charge God with injustice in imputing Adam's sin to us. Although we have got the mark of the beast and the devil upon us, yet they tell us we are not born in sin. Let them look abroad into the world and see the disorders in it, and think, if they can, if this is the paradise in which God did put man. No! Everything in the world is out of order.

I have often thought that if there were no other argument to prove original sin, the rising of wolves and tigers against man, even the barking of a dog against us, is a proof of original

sin. Tigers and lions would not dare rise against us if it were not for Adam's first sin: for when the creatures rise up against us it is as much as to say, 'You have sinned against God, and we take up our Master's quarrel.' If we look inwardly, we shall see enough of lusts, pride, malice, and revenge in all our hearts. This cannot come from God. It comes from our first parent, Adam, who, after he fell from God, fell into the devil.

However, some people may deny this. Yet when conviction comes, all carnal reasonings are battered down immediately, and the poor soul begins to feel and see the fountain from which all the polluted streams flow. When the sinner is first awakened, he begins to wonder, 'How did I come to be so wicked?' The Spirit of God then strikes, and shows that he has no good thing in him by nature. He sees that he is altogether gone out of the way and become abominable. The poor creature is made to lie at the foot of the throne of God and acknowledge that God would be just to damn him, though he never had committed one actual sin in his life.

Did you ever experience this, any of you—to justify God in your damnation—to own that you are by nature children of wrath, and that God may justly cut you off, though you never actually had offended him in all your life? If you were ever truly convicted, if your hearts were ever truly cut, if self were truly taken out of you, you would be made to see and feel this. If you have never felt the weight of original sin, do not call yourselves Christians.

I am persuaded original sin is the greatest burden of a true convert. This ever grieves the regenerate, sanctified soul. The indwelling of sin in the heart is the burden of a converted person, a true Christian. He continually cries out: Who will deliver me from this body of death, this indwelling corruption in my heart? Therefore, if you never felt this inward corruption, nor saw that God might justly curse you for it, my dear friends, you may speak peace to your hearts, but I fear there is no true peace.

Sins of our best duties

As Adam and Eve hid themselves among the trees of the garden and sewed fig-leaves together to cover their nakedness, so the poor sinner when awakened flies to his duties and to his performances, to hide himself from God. He goes to patch up a righteousness of his own. Says he, 'I will be mighty good now, I will reform, I will do all I can. Then certainly Jesus Christ will have mercy on me.' But before you can speak peace to your heart you must be brought to see that God may damn you for the best prayer you ever put up; you must be brought to see that all your duties, all your righteousness—as the prophet elegantly expresses it—are so far from recommending you to God and being any motive and inducement to God to have mercy on your poor soul, that he will see them to be filthy rags, a menstruous cloth. God hates them, and cannot but away with them, if you bring them to him in order to recommend you to his favour.

My dear friends, what is there in our performances to recommend us unto God? Our persons are in an unjustified state by nature, we deserve to be damned ten thousand times over. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. You may do things materially good, but you cannot do a thing formally and rightly good; because nature cannot act above itself. It is impossible that a man who is unconverted can act for the glory of God; he cannot do anything in faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Even after we are renewed, we are renewed but in part; indwelling sin continues in us, there is a mixture of corruption in every one of our duties. So that after we are converted, were Jesus Christ only to accept us according to our works, our works would damn us, for we cannot put up a prayer but it is far from that perfection which the moral law requires. I can say that I cannot pray but I sin. I cannot preach to you or to any others but I sin. I can do nothing without sin. Even my repentance needs to be repented of, and my tears to be washed in the

precious blood of my dear Redeemer.

Our best duties are as so many splendid sins. Before you can speak peace to your heart you must be made sick of all your duties and performances. There must be a deep conviction before you can be brought out of your self-righteousness; it is the last idol taken out of our heart. The pride of our hearts will not let us submit to the righteousness of Jesus Christ. But if you never felt the deficiency of your own righteousness, you cannot come to Jesus Christ.

The reigning sin of the Christian world

But then, before you can speak peace to your souls, there is one particular sin you must be greatly troubled for, and yet I fear there are few of you think what it is; it is the reigning, damning sin of the Christian world and yet the Christian would seldom, if ever, think of it. What is it?

It is what most of you think you are not guilty of—and that is, the sin of unbelief. Before you can speak peace to your heart, you must be troubled for the unbelief of your heart. But can it be supposed that any of you are unbelievers here in this churchyard, born in Scotland, a reformed country, who go to church every Sabbath? Can any of you that receive the sacrament once a year—oh, that it were administered oftener!—who had tokens for the sacrament, who keep up family prayer, not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

I fear upon examination, we should find that most of you have not so much faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the devil himself. I am persuaded the devil believes the divinity of Jesus Christ. That is more than many who call themselves Christians do. Indeed, he believes and trembles, and that is more than thousands among us do.

My friends, we mistake a historical faith for a true faith, wrought in the heart by the Spirit of God. You fancy you believe because you believe there is such a book as we call the Bible, or because you go to church. All this you may do and have no true faith in Christ. Merely to believe there was

such a person as Christ, or there is a book called the Bible, will do you no more good than to believe there was such a man as Alexander the Great. What thanks have we to give to God for his living Word! Yet we may have this Book and not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I suppose most of you would tell me you believed in Jesus Christ as long as ever you remember—you never did misbelieve. Then, you could not give me a better proof that you never yet believed in Jesus Christ, unless you were sanctified from the womb. For they that truly believe in Christ know there was a time when they did not believe in him.

You say you love God with all your heart, soul and strength. If I were to ask you how long it is since you loved God, you would say, 'As long as I can remember.' You never hated God, you know no time when there was enmity in your heart against God. Then, unless you were sanctified from birth, you never loved God in your life.

My dear friends, I am more particular in this, because it is a most deceitful delusion by which many people are carried away, thinking they believe already. It is the peculiar work of the Spirit of God to convince us of our unbelief—that we have got not faith. Says Jesus Christ, I will send the Comforter; and when he is come, he will reprove the world of the sin of unbelief; of sin because they believe not on me.

Enabled to call Christ Lord

My dear friends, did God ever show you that you had no faith? Were you ever made to bewail a hard heart of unbelief? Was it ever the language of your heart, 'Lord, give me faith; Lord, enable me to lay hold on you; Lord, enable me to call you my Lord and my God?' If not, do not speak peace to your heart. May the Lord awaken you and give you true, solid peace before you go hence and be no more!

Once more, then; before you can speak peace to your heart, you must not only be convinced of your actual and original sin, the sins of your own

righteousness, the sin of unbelief, but you must be enabled to lay hold upon the perfect, all-sufficient righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. You must lay hold by faith on the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and then you shall have peace. Come, says he, to me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

This speaks encouragement to all that are weary and heavy laden; but the promise of rest is made to them only upon their coming and believing, and taking him to be their God and their all. Before we can ever have peace with God we must be justified by faith through our Lord Jesus Christ. We must be enabled to apply Christ to our hearts. We must have Christ brought home to our souls, so as his righteousness may be made our righteousness, his merits imputed to us.

My dear friends, were you ever married to Jesus Christ? Did Jesus Christ ever give himself to you? Did you ever close with Christ by a living faith, so as to feel Christ in your hearts, so as to hear him speaking peace to your souls? Did peace ever flow in upon your hearts like a river? I pray God he may come and speak peace to you. These things you must experience.

I am talking of the invisible realities of another world, of inward religion, of the work of God upon a poor sinner's heart. I am talking of a matter of great importance. You are all concerned in it, your souls are concerned in it, your eternal salvation is concerned in it. You may think you are at peace, but perhaps the devil has lulled you asleep into a carnal lethargy and security, and will endeavour to keep you there till he gets you to hell, where you will be awakened. But it will be dreadful to find yourselves so fearfully mistaken, when the great gulf is fixed, when you will be calling to all eternity for a drop of water to cool your tongue and shall not obtain it.

George Whitefield (1714–70)

Read, Read, Read!

by
Martin Allen

The subject of the minister and reading is crucial. Reading and speaking are the two elemental activities in our task. If we could only read well and speak fluently then we would be well on our way to being more effective ministers.

Let me ask what is the *fastest* selling book in history? It is a book published a year ago which within weeks ran to 5 million copies. Its title is *In the Kitchen with Rosie*. It's a low fat cooking book by Rosie Daley, the personal chef of Oprah Winfrey the popular TV chat show hostess in the USA. Now, the *best* selling book? The Bible of course.

As ministers we must be stretched by books, but my trick question illustrates that we must be in touch with what people are reading. That fastest selling book tells us that many people in our culture are preoccupied with their health and appearance!

The Church of Scotland emphasises the importance of reading for ministers. In 1990, the General Assembly approved a document entitled 'The Basic Tasks of the Ordained Minister'. In it, basic tasks are listed under seven headings. Under the second heading of 'Personal Study and Spiritual Growth' are five sub-headings which include:

- regular theological reading and study for its own sake;

- regular reading and study associated with worship and the preparation of sermons, addresses and prayers;
- the ongoing cultivation of a personal and daily spiritual life;
- sharing with colleagues of all denominations in local or area study groups.

Time for reading

How much time should one give to wider reading? It's very easy to be idealistic. In his book *I Believe in Preaching*, John Stott sets out what he considers to be a realistic goal:

- One hour a day
- One session a week (morning, afternoon or evening)
- One day a month
- One week a year
- =600 hours a year.

That's a lot of hours! Stott's framework is a simple one but requires discipline. It certainly requires sympathetic and sensitive church elders and deacons. It tends to assume that there are no interruptions in the working week which simply is not reality. However, if we don't set any goals, we will not reach any. So set goals and be disciplined in making time for reading.

The substance of reading

Of necessity any selection of reading material for ministers is bound to be subjective. The danger is of being swamped with a list of 'musts' to be decent preachers! A long list of books of required reading compounds the

guilt that already exists! However with these riders, let me suggest a pattern of reading under five headings in the belief that all five levels of reading should be going on simultaneously in some measure.

Theological reading

On completing a course of study in preparation for the ministry, we can easily make the mistake of thinking our theological reading is over. This ought not to be so. Ministers should engage in theological reading all their ministries.

Sermon preparation will of course invariably involve some theological reflection, but in addition there should be wider reading not directly related to Sunday. If we are preaching and teaching from the same limited circle of theological knowledge, then we will lack the freshness of new insights. We should be teaching from an ever-widening circle of perception gained in an ongoing process of study. Are there ways busy ministers can be encouraged to read?

A Reading Group

A few years ago, I started a Rutherford House Reading Group in the Manse. Three times a year ministers drawn from various denominations in our district meet for discussion. Someone introduces a selected book with a thirty minute critique. General discussion follows for an hour and a half. This forces ministers to buy a book, read and think about it. It is amazing how many books we have read over a number of years. We select books from a wide theological spectrum covering biblical, pastoral, historical and biographical material.

Among the books that our group has discussed have been: *Preaching* ed. Samuel Logan; *The Cross of Christ* and *The Contemporary Christian* by John Stott; *The Christian Life—Studies in John Owen*; *Power Religion*, symposium by Colson, Sproul, McGrath, etc; *Bridge Building* by A. McGrath; *The Reformed Pastor* and *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* by Richard Baxter; *Jonathan Edwards* and *Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, Vol. 1

& 2 by Iain Murray; *Skilful Shepherds* by Derek Tidball; *Baptism with the Holy Spirit* by Michael Eaton; *Whatever Happened to Hell?* by John Blanchard; *Among God's Giants* by J.I. Packer.

Book reviews

One minister over a period of a couple of years wrote quite a number of book reviews on a whole range of subjects. He perceived this as one means to enforce discipline in reading and reflecting on theological books.

Magazines and Journals

It is one thing to subscribe to theological magazines; it is quite another to peruse their contents. I mention a few: *The Rutherford Journal*, the *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, the *Cambridge Papers*, the *Banner of Truth Magazine*, and *The Scottish Journal of Theology*. How important to subscribe to one or more journals and make time to read them.

I would suggest that any programme should include a blend of classical and contemporary works. We can select new important books from review sections of any journal. However, do not neglect the classical theological works. The *Institutes* by Calvin should be read on a regular basis. A good starting point in Calvin is the chapter on the 'Life of the Christian Man'. Also work at John Owen, Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards. If there is one great book to start with it is *The Religious Affections* by Edwards, a work which could profoundly affect our view of preaching and our understanding of pastoral work.

Here is my own (highly subjective) personal preference for contemporary theologians. J. I. Packer, under whom I studied in Vancouver three years ago. Sinclair Ferguson, whose writings are always concise, and Donald Macleod who is a fresh and stimulating thinker.

The tyranny of the urgent means that we find it very difficult to make time for wider theological reading. Indeed we are afraid to make such time in case we fail to meet our deadlines. However, let me underline the importance of widening our circles of

knowledge otherwise we will communicate from a restricted reservoir of knowledge.

Effective Communication Reading

It is important to read the writings of those who are recognised as effective preachers. After all, we are in the business of communicating and I do wonder how effective and interesting we are in this matter.

In the last thirty or forty years there has been a considerable increase in the number of preachers within Scotland who are committed to communicating the message of the Bible. However, we need to ask as Spurgeon once asked whether we are preaching in 'as interesting a way as possible'. Are we in danger of turning out a generation of dull, predictable, even boring, Bible teachers? I put it in strong terms to alert us to the need to learn from effective communicators.

In all our preaching our aim should be that others say of us as they once said of Jonathan Edwards, 'All his doctrine was application and all his application was doctrine'. It is in application we tend to be weak today. It's interesting that the Puritan sermon in the 17th century consisted typically of 50% application; in a 25 minute sermon the application would occupy about 12 minutes.

What tends to happen today is that in a 25 minute sermon only the last few minutes are devoted to practical application. In this connection I would recommend a helpful book on the subject of applying God's message; *Truth Applied* by Jay E. Adams.

I am now in the habit of reading every few weeks the writings of preachers whom people enjoy listening to. The theological slant may not be the same as my own, but it is a useful exercise to study how popular preachers communicate. Among those whom I have found helpful would be Ronald Dunn and in particular the following: *Don't Just Sit there have Faith, Don't Just Stand there Pray Something, When Heaven is Silent, Staying on Top, Praying for Others*. Dunn is able to express biblical truths in contemporary lan-

guage and uses good illustrations.

The writings of John Blanchard communicate effectively. In his book, *Whatever happened to Hell?* which deals with a very sensitive issue, he employs a fund of illustrative material and quotations. R.C. Sproul's popular writings, for example, *The Holiness of God*, also provide an example of plain, clear, fresh communicating. If we find it hard to make up our own illustrations, I see nothing wrong in borrowing from others and giving acknowledgement where necessary.

I would also mention Max Lucado who is a master of vivid graphic, descriptive, easily read material. Titles I have found helpful are; *No wonder they call Him Saviour*, *When God Whispers your Name*, *The Applause of Heaven*, *In the Eye of the Storm*, *Six Hours One Friday*.

Derek Prime formerly of Charlotte Baptist Chapel said once that he always liked to have one book on preaching beside him to dip into from time to time to remind him of the end result of study, reading and reflection: namely, effective preaching and teaching.

Reading for Sermon Preparation

In the process of preparing sermons, the danger is to read commentaries on the text too soon. It is important to spend the optimum time reading the Bible passage allowing the Holy Spirit to bring its truths to bear upon one's mind and heart. In this way the bones of the message will emerge, if not the flesh at this stage.

For the flesh, we turn to commentaries. I tend not to look at dated commentaries apart from those recognised as classic in their own right. Rather I read contemporary works, especially those written by preachers. I look for proper understanding of the text and insights and lines of application. I tend to gravitate towards the writings of (amongst others) Stott, Lucas, Milne, Jackman. For more substantial work on the texts I personally find the Old Testament commentaries of Leupold and Keil-Delitzsch and the New Testament works of Lenski to be illuminating. I

acknowledge there are many other excellent commentaries.

I would recommend purchasing tapes of Bible exposition. The Proclamation Trust tape library catalogue is a good place to start. There are helpful tape expository series by Dick Lucas and Roy Clements which can be obtained through the Trust catalogue or church tape libraries (St Helens, Bishopsgate, and Eden Baptist Church, Cambridge).

Secular Reading

Should ministers read tabloids or quality newspapers? I opt for the latter and find plenty of illustrative material in *The Herald* and *The Times*. I find writers such as Janet Daley, Matthew Paris, Bernard Levin, William Rees Mogg thought provoking. John Macleod with his Tuesday column in *The Herald* usually provokes reaction!

It's good to subscribe to a magazine such as *Newsweek*. This international magazine gives coverage of world events. It also carries a useful section on quotations of the week. The main difficulty is finding time to read it. The magazine has recently carried useful articles relating to the information revolution facing us in the next few years.

Modern historical writing can be helpful. I received a lot of insights from Paul Johnston's massive book entitled, *A History of the Modern World From 1917 to the 1980s*.

Biographies have always had a fascination for me. I could mention many but recommend particularly Alistair Horne's two volume work on Harold MacMillan. This classic is superb holiday reading containing much material one can use in preaching. For example, there is interesting information on the 'swinging 60s', a period which has vitally affected subsequent decades.

What of novels? Thrillers by Dick Francis, Mary Higgins Clark, P.D. James, Ruth Rendall, Patricia Cornwell and Colin Dexter contain helpful illustrative material as well as providing relaxation. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said, 'A preacher has to be like a

squirrel and has to learn to collect and store matter for the future days of winter'. The preacher gathers material from every possible source!

Inspirational Reading

Each one's choice of books that inspire is bound to be subjective. But I believe it is necessary to have nearby a book that stirs the soul and challenges the conscience. One well known preacher said that at the beginning of every new year he read through E. M. Bounds book, *Power through Prayer* to remind himself of the priority of prayer in his ministry.

Spiritual biographies are indispensable. Coming from Dundee my 'patron saint' is R. Murray McCheyne. In my opinion his *Memoir and Remains* by Andrew Bonar should be prescribed reading for all students for the ministry. Biographies of Edwards, Whitefield and David Brainerd I have also found invaluable. I would also warmly recommend the biography of Edward Payson ('seraphic Payson' as described by Lloyd-Jones). All Lloyd-Jones writings on preaching are worth (re-) reading as is his book on revival.

However, if I were to be a 'castaway' on the Desert Island Discs programme and asked what book I would take with me, it would be either Vol. 2 of John Owen's work *Of Communion with God*, or Vol. 7 *Spiritual Mindedness*. His 'experimental' writings are humbling and inspiring. It is this inspirational element which we need most of all, is it not? Remember Lloyd-Jones' classic definition of preaching, 'logic on fire'. We need the logic of minds informed by solid theological, biblical truth, but we also need the fire of hearts aflame with ardour, fervour and love. This is the great contribution which inspirational reading can make. So, read, read, read.

Martin Allen, Minister of Chryston Parish Church, Glasgow.

The Psalms are not just individual expressions of religious faith, but they come out of a community of faith. They are the songs of the covenant community, and as a unit form the song book of God's people. They clearly show how vital the covenant relationship was, as the psalmists proclaim the kingship of God over his people. As covenant servants they had to reaffirm in various ways their allegiance to the Lord. They

of expressions being used including 'believe', 'trust', 'take refuge in', 'rely upon', 'wait for', and 'wait patiently for'. Even when precise terms relating to faith are not evident, yet it was faith which underlay the whole approach of the psalmists to God.

Also, adopting this understanding of the faith of the psalmists helps us to see the structure and unity of the psalms, especially those in which there is an oscillation between hope and despair.¹

sin, and the Old Testament believers enjoyed the prospective efficacy of the Cross of Christ, while we today enjoy the retrospective efficacy. Luther was right in designating some of the Psalms as 'Pauline Psalms' (Pss 32, 51, 130, and 143) because they announce the same free grace of God as we see in the Gospel.

We today can use the Psalter's words relating to salvation, though we view the words as post-Calvary and there-

*Alan
Harman*

Preaching from the Psalms

*Part
Two*

paid their tribute of praise to him in extolling his creation, or his great acts of redemption. In speaking of the majesty of his person they were offering spiritual sacrifices of praise to their king.

The Psalter, therefore, served the broad purpose of reminding the people that they were God's people. The long historical psalms such as 78, 105, and 135 show how God's presence was manifested to his people in the course of history, and in singing them the people had to recall the mighty acts of God in salvation. The Psalms also show how God was so forgiving to an erring people. 'You were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds', is the way in which one psalmist puts it (Ps. 99:8).

Two Testaments—One Bible

The Psalms also serve to show us what believing faith was like in the midst of the changes in human life. We must not make any distinction between the faith of Old Testament believers and those of us in the New Testament period in respect of trust in God and in his Word. When the New Testament writers wish to illustrate the nature of faith they appeal to Old Testament examples (see Rom. 4, Gal. 3, Heb. 11, Jas 2).

The Psalms are full of expressions of trust in the Lord, with a great variety

fore understand them of the fullness of God's saving mercy in Christ.² The God to whom the psalmists pray is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. John Bright has rightly defended the position that not only may the Old Testament be preached from Christian pulpits but it must be. He goes on to say:

The Christian Gospel cannot be preached only from Act II of the drama of redemption without misunderstanding and distortion. If the New Testament is the key to the significance of the Old, the Old is no less the key to the understanding of the New. As Act I of the drama of redemption, the Old Testament not only points to Christ and takes on a new significance in the light of Christ; it also speaks to the Christian its own distinctive and indispensable word regarding the nature of his God and his faith, and thus fills out and completes his understanding of the Gospel.³

To deprive Christian people of preaching from the Psalms is to impoverish them seriously in relation to experiential religion, and to leave a gap which cannot be filled by preaching from any other biblical book.

Psalms are prospective

The relevance of the Psalms for Christians today is shown by the extensive use which the New Testament itself makes of the Psalter. Out of approximately 560 quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, about one-third of these are from the Psalms. In applying them to particular experiences of Christians (for example, see the use of Ps. 22:21 in 2 Tim. 4:17, or the use of Ps. 118:6 in Heb. 13:7) the New Testament is showing us how applicable the Psalms are for Christians today.

However, we must read them in the light of redemption, for it provides the grid by which we interpret them. The experience of salvation of Old and New Testament believers is the same. There was only one final offering for

Guidelines for Preaching

Structure in the Psalms

We must preach on the psalms as units. This has to be understood in two ways. First of all, each psalm is not just a collection of discrete verses which happen to be printed one after another. Together they form a unit, a single entity, and interpretation of that entity as a whole is what is required. We have to approach psalms as we approach the parables in the Gospels. The message is contained in the whole literary form. It helps to write down what we think the theme of the psalm is before we start to develop the full outline for a sermon.

Secondly, within a psalm there are also natural breaks. Strophes are present, being marked off by refrains,⁴ or by the use of technical terms such as *Selah* or the word 'for' (Hebrew *ki*), or by the alphabetic acrostic schemes. This is particularly important in regard to preaching from the longer psalms, when they will have to be broken up into convenient preaching units. The obvious example is Psalm 119, where within each section there is a dominating idea.

Doctrine of God

We must preach the Psalms theologically, for they are God-centred. The Psalms are first and foremost revelation about God from God.

It is interesting how much use has been made of the Psalms in writing of the doctrine of God. At the time of the Reformation both Luther and Calvin were profoundly affected by the Psalms. Luther wrote his first commentary on the Psalms, while Calvin in writing his commentary on them prefaced it with deeply personal reflections. It is not surprising that Calvin made such extensive use of the Psalms in his doctrinal writing, and after Romans it was the second most frequently quoted biblical book in the *Institutes*. In the final Latin edition of the *Institutes* (1559) Romans was cited 598 times, and the Psalms 580 times.⁵ To take a more recent illustration,

Louis Berkhof in his *Systematic Theology* quotes Matthew the most frequently of any biblical book (414 times), but this is followed by his use of the Psalms (332 times).

If the use of the Psalms is so significant in theological writing on the doctrine of God, then this should show through in the use we make of the Psalms in our preaching. The Godward focus must be apparent, as the Psalms are either prayers to God, or songs about him.

Emotion in the Psalms

We must also preach passionately from the Psalms, because they themselves are so full of emotion. They are not abstract writing about theology. They are intensely personal, and they represent the popular religious feeling of redeemed sinners.

They also portray all the varied experiences and emotions of the human heart. The psalmists bare their souls for others to see, and they express the deepest emotions and longings. All the moods of everyday life are there, and we cannot expound the psalms without entering into the joy and grief, the bewilderment and pain, the despair and the exultation which they contain.

We can preach on these experiences in the psalms but that must be preceded by the revelation of God which is contained in these psalms. The priority must be given to God's revelation, not to man's experience.

Appeals for help

The Psalms also give us another view of the life of a believer, quite different from that which is often portrayed or even that which enters into so many hymns. It is striking that the majority of the Psalms are not hymns of joy, but rather laments. This does not mean that they are pessimistic in tone, for they often contain strong affirmation of trust in the Lord. Terms like 'appeal for help' or 'complaint' may be nearer the mark in describing their character. What they give is a true reflection of the life of a believer, and with the experiences and the feelings of the

Psalms we can all relate. So many in our congregations can relate to them as well, and to preach from them touches a responsive cord in the hearts of our hearers.⁶

The Psalms in pastoral preaching

Finally, we must preach pastorally from the Psalms. We are preaching to people who are so like the psalmists of old, experiencing human life as it always was. Nowhere does the scripture give us the depths of insight into pastoral problems of an intensely personal nature than it does in the Psalms.

There must be a link between pulpit ministry on the one hand and pastoral ministry on the other, and preaching from the Psalms gives us an area in which the connection can be clearly seen.⁷ Pastoral work informs preaching,⁸ while preaching on the Psalms will often expose pastoral problems, and deal with them to some extent.

One of the reasons why Christians today need so much access to counselling services is the absence of preaching which touches deeply into their emotional and spiritual lives. The Psalms speak 'to a level of consciousness not touched by textbook propositions. The Psalms speak to the heart and transform it'.⁹

Conclusion

There seems to be less preaching from the Psalms now than was once the case in Protestant churches. One has only to look at the number of printed expositions of the Psalms from the past which were actually preached as sermons to see that. While the Psalms present us with difficulties of exegesis and application, yet the benefits for preachers and congregations alike are great. In doing so we identify with the saints in the Old Testament church in their longings and fears, their despair and their confident trust. Preaching from the Psalms should direct congregations back to the close interrelation between doctrine about God and our experience of God himself.

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NOTES

- 1 For a helpful discussion of these and other aspects of faith in the Psalms, see G Wenham, *Faith in the Old Testament* (TSE, n.d.), pp 18-24.

2 See the comments on the way in which the Psalms connect Old and New Testaments together in W. Van Gemeren, 'The Psalms, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol.5 (Zondervan, 1990), pp.7-8.

3 John Bright, *The Authority of the Old*
- Testament* (Baker, 1975), p.204.

4 See the refrains in Pss. 39, 42-43, 44, 46, 49, 56, 57, 62, 67, 78, 80, 99, 107, 114, 136, 144, 145.

5 These figures are given by F.L.Battles in his edition of John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion 1536 edition* (Eerdmans, revised edition, 1986), p.1.

6 See the comments by John Goldingay, *Praying in the Psalms* (Grove Spirituality Series, No. 44, 1993), pp.14-20 on the use of laments such as Psalm 88 in
- pastoral ministry. In speaking of students of the Psalms who find it difficult to enter into Psalm 88, Goldingay says: 'I still seek to encourage them to enter into it, for the sake of those they may minister to if not for themselves. There are many in the church and in the world who do weep, and many others who need to do so, and when the psalms of lament are not functioning as our prayer for ourselves they can become our intercession for the church and for the world. They

provide us with a way of entering into the experience of people in need and standing in their place of prayer' (pp.14-15).

- 7 W.Brueggeman, 'Psalms and Life of Faith', *JSOT* 17 (1980), says that there has to be a blending of 'historical exegetical interest' and 'a contemporary pastoral agenda'. He goes on to mention liturgical, devotional and pastoral use in our contemporary faith and piety. While he mentions that the pastors 'find in the

Psalms the most remarkable and reliable resources for many situations, for which the hospital call is paradigmatic', he does not refer to proclamation in preaching. The most important use of the Psalms pastorally should be teaching and preaching from them.

- 8 This fact must be stressed for some pastors do not seem to realise the depths of the thoughts and emotions of the people in their congregations. I think that E.P. Clowney is absolutely correct

when he says: 'Beside knowing the Word of the Lord and the Lord of the Word, we must know people'. *Inside the Sermon*, ed. R.A.Bodey [Baker, 1990], p.59.

- 9 S.G.Meyer, 'The Psalms and Personal Counselling', *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 2 (1974), 30.

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A word to those in the pews

from David Searle

How to get the most out of...

Preaching is often thought of as a monologue, when a minister stands in a pulpit, six feet above contradiction, speaks for twenty-five minutes, and then announces the closing hymn. I would suggest that such a view is most unhelpful. Preaching should never be a monologue, but rather an ongoing dialogue between preacher and congregation. There ought to be a slow-motion exchange of thought being transmitted between pulpit and pew. The listener should be provoked to new thinking, and respond in conversation and question with the pastor, who should then reply the following Sunday, and so on.

In considering the whole question of how to listen to the Word of God, therefore, we must move away from the limited view of preaching as 'one-way' to a more constructive understanding of preaching as 'two-way'. Until there is interaction between preacher and people, there will never be real progress or spiritual growth.

Look beyond the preacher

We all know in theory that preachers are just as human as we are and that they therefore share our fallen natures.

They often fail, make mistakes and commit sin. But even though we know that in our heads, we generally have a higher expectation of the preacher than we have for ourselves. We feel that somehow the preacher should have 'arrived' spiritually, and be on a higher level than the rest of the congregation.

Yes and no. James says that those who teach the Word will be judged more strictly than others (James 3:1). Nevertheless, the preacher will never in this life 'arrive' spiritually and remains as weak and frail a sinner as others.

We must remember this when we listen to sermons, and we must always look beyond the preacher to the Word being proclaimed. Do not let us set up on a pedestal the one preaching. Rather let us set our sights on the Lord Himself and be eager to hear what He has to say from His truth. True preachers are only saying to their people what God has already said to them. The preacher needs to hear the sermon just as much as the congregation.

Prepare for worship

The principle of 'preparation' for holy communion should be carried into

'preparation' for the Lord's Day. There are times when we fail to draw strength and encouragement from the worship because we have gone to church in the wrong frame of mind and with the wrong attitude.

Sundays can become a hectic rush instead of a Sabbath rest. Discipline and planning are needed. It may be that we need to rise on Sundays half an hour earlier and sacrifice some of our 'long lie' in order to spend time with God before ever we leave for church. We must prepare ourselves for the services. We will then worship in the right frame of mind, and be hungering for the word of life and longing to hear the voice of God.

If your minister is preaching a series on a particular book of the Bible, then you can read ahead and anticipate the sermon by familiarising yourself with the Bible passage for the day. You can study it beforehand yourself, lodging it in your mind before ever the sermon begins. Then you will be ready and will discover that much more of the exposition makes sense.

Understand the cost of sermon preparation

Recently, while staying for a few days

in an Irish manse, the minister said to me, 'I would not have wanted you to have heard last Sunday's sermons. They were both badly prepared because I simply did not have any time in my study the week before'. He went on to tell me that his small rural congregation were so demanding in pastoral calls that his quality time with God was being squeezed to an unacceptable minimum. (He was only echoing what I had heard from two other ministers that very week).

No congregation is going to have really edifying preaching, which digs deep into the truth of Scripture, presents that truth in an attractive and palatable form and applies it meaningfully to people's daily lives unless the minister has had time to meditate, read, study and prepare.

Over the thirty-three years I have spent in the pastoral ministry ('pastoral' means 'pasturing' which means 'feeding the flock'—don't confuse the work of the shepherd with that of the sheep-dog), I have found that I cannot adequately prepare for two services on Sunday in under less than twenty-five hours each week. (I am not including preparing for a Midweek meeting. I might add that I would also expect to spend a minimum of fifteen hours each week in visitation).

One of the most practical ways of helping your minister would be to understand the pressures of the ministry, and then seek to protect the precious hours required for preparation. Find out whether your minister is an 'owl' or a 'lark'. Some prepare late at night; others prepare in the morn-

ings. Then guard the minister against unnecessary interruptions during study time.

Offer faithful prayer

Would it surprise you to learn that sermon preparation is extremely hard work? Let me assure you it is. Indeed, it is harder than that. It is actually a spiritual battle. Whenever the study door is shut, the Bible opened and the work of preparation begun, the devil immediately begins to distract the preacher from the task, and thoughts of other urgent matters needing instant attention come flooding into the mind. It requires determined effort, hard slog and blood, sweat and tears to prepare a sermon which is going to bring forth from the Word things 'both new and old'. A constantly ringing telephone or doorbell is the ideal chance for the old devil to take away the preacher from the spiritual toil of preparing a banquet for the people of God.

Do you remember how Paul concludes the great passage on the Christian soldier and the gospel armour? He writes 'Pray for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel.... Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should' (Ephesians 6:19).

Paul has just been expounding the art of Christian warfare. We are engaged in a most deadly conflict. Most of the battle of the sermon is fought in the study—preserving time for the work, and fighting through for a message which is going to build up the

people of God. Every believer can and should take part in that struggle through prayer and so share in the victory of the living Word being faithfully proclaimed.

Hide God's Word in your heart

The Psalmist wrote: 'I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you' (119:11). We need to learn to take to ourselves the word through which God has spoken to us, to ponder on it, to commit it to memory, and to 'hide it in our hearts'. In the final analysis, what ought to be happening as we listen to our minister preaching is that God's own word should be being incorporated into our very living, and so being allowed to shape the kind of people we are.

God's purpose for preaching, through teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16), is that our characters should be built up, that we should constantly be becoming maturer, stronger, more effective Christians. At the end of the day, God is looking to see in us something of the 'family likeness' which all those who call Him Father ought to have. The family likeness will be seen in us when those who live and work with us catch glimpses of the Lord Himself in our smiles, and words and actions, for His glory. When that happens the preaching will have borne the best of fruit in our living.

The Warden

...your minister's preaching

The Call to the Ministry & the Minister's Personal Needs

**The first in a series of articles by
Montagu Barker on Stress in the Ministry**

Doctors in different specialities have very different personalities. For example, surgeons are great people for doing things. They like to see and feel a problem, and then cut it out. If they are not quite sure what is going on inside someone, they will just open up and look. Very practical, very physical, very down to earth people!

By contrast, the psychiatrist is a very

different kind of person. Cause and effect in his patients may seem so remote that at times the psychiatrist's job is like looking through a keyhole and right through the room, and into the keyhole of the next room.

These are stereotypes, but I know that I went into psychiatry because I wanted to

look at the whole person in a way that other branches of medicine would not enable me to do in quite the same way.

Call to the Ministry

But what of the call to the ministry? We rarely talk about ministers' personal needs. How much do they *need* the kind of work to which they feel

God has called them? How much do they *need* this particular kind of work? What does the ministry give them at a personal level? Part of my work as a psychiatrist is to look at these hidden motives and to endeavour to evaluate them.

Freedom and security

What is it that people find in the ministry? On the face of it there is the attraction of release from a humdrum routine. Ministers have no immediate boss. They can suit themselves and the structure of their day is loose. Yet they have security (though it may be that security of tenure will soon become a thing of the past).

I am aware that the true situation in the ministry may well turn out to be that everyone considers himself the minister's boss, to such an extent that ministers even feel guilty about being seen tending the roses on their day off!

Prestige and respect

Then there is prestige within the community (both in the church community and the wider community where the congregation is situated). There is also for ministers the tangible evidence of total commitment to God which 'holy orders' automatically confer. They may not have much cash, but within the Christian fellowship they will be respected and their opinion sought after. The ministry therefore provides a sense of being needed and a personal assurance of having found God's will.

Or does the ministry give ready relationships—relationships that are structured, limited and dependent? I suspect that some ministers actually find it very difficult to relate to people easily and naturally in ordinary life. Within any of the caring professions there must be a structure to relationships which can be very fulfilling, and yet there must also be a limit set to them.

Escapism?

What about escape from reality? As the prospect of failure looms larger, the Christian students who are finding

their examinations too tough may begin thinking about the ministry as an easier, more attainable alternative. Or older persons in middle life may come across those common feelings of frustration arising from a sense of non-achievement, and may reflect that their professions are not really giving what they expected of their lives. The conclusion may be the conviction of a divine call into the ministry.

Don't misunderstand me. I am not saying that God cannot come at such times of crisis and lay hold of certain people to lead them into the ministry. What I am saying is that we need to be alert to possible motives which may be very different to a true call to serve God, and we may all too easily mistake certain inner feelings for his call.

Atonement for the past

Or how much is the call to the ministry part of some people's conversion? The new birth produces a new dedication to God which can be confused with a call to be a minister. It may even be that after conversion there is a desire to make some atonement for the manner of life in which someone once lived. I offer you an example of what I mean. Charles Kingsley, the author of *The Water Babies* was a sensitive man who was able to write in a perceptive way. He wrote to his fiancé:

'Day after day there has been an involuntary still small voice directing me to the church as the only rest for my troubled spirit in this world. I did not know the reason for this strange haunting of the mind though I thought it was the only atonement I could make in the eyes of the world for my offences. I feel, Fanny, that I am under a heavy debt to God. How can I pay this better than by devoting myself to the religion I have scorned? Making of a de-baucher a preacher of purity and holiness and the destroyer of systems, a weak though determined upholder of the only true system.'

As his biographer says, 'He sealed his

return to faith with a vow to become a clergyman'. His fiancé was also caught up in the vow. Although she went along with it, it was not a particularly happy situation and there were unhappy consequences. However, in those days there were very few options open to someone of her class and position if the husband or fiancé decided to follow a certain course or profession. But it seems that Kingsley's choice of the ministry was his atonement for his past rather than a choice he and Fanny considered fully together before God.

Hidden Motivations

There are many people who speak about their calls who are not able to reflect and communicate in the way Kingsley did. The more subjective—the more inward, personal and associated with other life events—the call is, the more vulnerable ministers will be to stress and difficulty later on in their ministries. The more hidden the motivations, the more likely they are to be caught out by those motivations if and when they are unfulfilled.

Personal reflection

God may indeed be calling, and someone may sense and recognise that call. But ministers also need to ask themselves what personal and psychological investments are there as well. No one should be afraid or ashamed to look at his motives throughout his ministry.

After all we try and train our children to reflect on their behaviour and the way we discipline them. God has called to the ministry, but in the same way he also asks those he has called to think carefully what other aspects there are in that call that may be confusing and contaminating. Ministers need to reflect on these things. They may need to smile wryly and make a few adjustments. If they cannot or will not engage in such reflection, other factors may confuse their call without necessarily invalidating it.

Fulfilment

Jean Coggan's book, *Wife to the Archbishop*, illustrates this well. When she became engaged to Donald he was a curate in Islington.

'Here Donald Coggan was to preach the Word to the poor and underprivileged. Jean was fascinated by it all, for here in Islington people were in need. It was a parish of 19,000, reflecting the poverty of the Great Depression. Here at last she felt there might be a real work for her to do with the man who would be her husband, among the teeming crowds he longed to serve.'

An immensely loyal woman, and a tremendous support to her husband, she found herself fulfilled in ministering to the needs of the people in the parish. Then they moved to Canada when her husband became Principal of the Toronto College of Divinity. It was there that Jean suddenly became aware of an unexpected and insidious feeling that all was not well with her. A darkness of spirit entirely alien to her hopeful nature had begun to engulf her. She had nothing to do. Deep in her heart she wanted people, she wanted to be *needed*. Now she felt useless for she apparently had no rôle to play. The only useful thing she did was to be a sort of College taxi-driver. She would say, 'I can't find God. I have no sense of reality. I feel completely blank towards God.'

She came through that time, but she discovered that something which she had previously seen as an essential part of her call had now gone. From her description, it seems to me that her call to spiritual ministry had become entangled with her personal needs.

Sociological Considerations

Financial stringency

Another issue that faces many clergy with respect to their call is financial stringency. I was recently reading through the medical notes of a

minister's child when I was astonished and disturbed to read the comment by an outside professional observer: 'Social Status—Low Income Family'. Those words had a starkness that shook me. Yet hospitality is expected of the minister's family. Ministers with private, independent means is a thing of the past. It is often a struggle for manse families to make ends meet, especially for the wives. They are expected to maintain a certain pattern of family life, often having to go out to work.

Middle-class culture

Then ministers are also faced with the tension between Christian and middle class culture. Many Christians today are first generation Christians with no Christian background. This creates difficulties in two areas of ministry. First, young ministers from such a background will have no Christian models for their home families and relationships.

Secondly, they have the uncertainty of sorting out what are truly Christian attitudes from what are merely middle class attitudes. When I was a student we were motivated by words like, 'sacrifice', 'discipline' and 'Christian austerity'. The new generation of Christians smile at such concepts. There is a real tension as values one generation considered as essential for every Christian are now questioned and even rejected.

Mobility

In addition there is the problem of mobility and the call to move from one parish to another. Our society is affected by a sense of loose roots, and this affects ministers as well. Some advocate a shorter spell in a parish, but what are the effects of frequent moves on wives and families?

Equally important (though too often ignored), wider church families are being subjected to the repeated loss of their pastors, with a traumatic bereavement experience each time. Some pastors see that as good for the parish, but there are other ways of looking at it. As fellowships become transient and less stable, and their

pastors slip through after short ministries, an increasing burden falls on those families that are fixed and permanent. Such families are then less able to keep supporting their ministers' families in the way they should and would like to do.

In conclusion

Perhaps it may seem, particularly to those reading this article who about to start in the ministry, that I am bringing into question the whole concept of the call. Not at all. That is between you and God on the one hand, and the people who train and commission you on the other hand. My point is that alongside the very real, spiritual aspects of the call of God, other aspects of our God-given humanity are also involved.

Those called to the ministry need to take more account of their personal and emotional needs, and not think about the ministry only in terms of spiritual needs. After all, we are fallen men and women and have all the afflictions entailed in the Fall. Those afflictions include the clouding of our motives. If we do not recognise these implications of our fallenness, when times of severe stress overtake us, such issues may confound us and cause us to doubt or question our call.

Mercifully God is much more gracious with us than we are with ourselves. May those who are ministers recognise these issues and work through them with the Lord's help, and so be able to face stress when it comes their way—as it most certainly will.

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Pastoral Skills

Problem Visiting

Can any of us say we have never felt uncomfortable, even repulsed by some of the visits we have had to do? How do we handle them? Do we ask our pastoral helper to do the visit for us? Or do we knock so softly that we hope we will not be heard and the door won't be opened?

Such visits can be on two levels. First, there are those that remind us of our own *mortality* and therefore we can feel quite unable to be of any real comfort. Do we hear ourselves 'playing a tape' of mere platitudes? Second, we may have to see some whose *morality* in

our opinion leaves a lot to be desired!

Emotional stages

When people learn they have a serious illness, a number of stages of emotion are often experienced and are very natural. 'Not me, it can't be true'—incredulity or even *denial* can be very strong and often relatives cannot understand why the ill person is acting as though he had not heard the news. This first stage can act as a buffer for a time after deeply disturbing news. This does not mean that the person will not later welcome and find relief in being able to talk with someone about his impending death.

Denial is usually a temporary defence which can give way to a second stage involving *anger* and possible *resentment*. This can be difficult to cope with for the patient as well as for the family and visitor. The anger can be towards the doctor or it can turn towards the church and even God.

Both in illness and in bereavement

anger and resentment can be very strong emotions. 'Why me?' is a question we may often be asked. This may signal a time for the visitor to come along side and listen, rather than to attempt to pour out platitudes.

Ronald Dunn whose personal family experience earned him the right to wrestle with the question writes in his book *When Heaven is Silent*: "'Why me?'" is a useless question for in the end it solves nothing. Only when we face up to the inadequacy of this question will we be free to ask the right one...the one put forth by Christ Himself, "What now?" Dunn goes on to say that this second question 'releases the trance of self pity and transforms the landscape of suffering from a random, accidental absurdity to a vital part of the grand scheme of a great God.'

There can be yet another stage: *bargaining*. Bargaining is possibly less well known but can often be displayed in brief periods by the very ill. 'Yes I know I am going to die, but first let me see my grandchild born'. It is an attempt to postpone the inevitable by looking forward.

Yet another stage can be when the person may be too weak for anger and *depression* may temporarily come; this is always a difficult time for the helper and ill alike. Our natural reaction to sadness is to attempt to cheer up the patient, encouraging them to look on the bright side of life. This can be an expression of our own needs and an inability to tolerate upset. It can of course be useful to bring a little brightness or happiness into the home or hospital ward but it may be empty. One should be aware that the depression can be a path towards acceptance of the situation. The psalms can be a most useful tool to read

The
third in
the series of
three articles
by Elizabeth Frost

during a time of depression, both with those who are ill and with the family.

Acceptance of both illness and bereavement can be a very real help to those who are affected. We see this when we visit the home of an elderly person who is dying a firm believer and we know how acceptance can be an enriching experience—one entailing sorrow for the loved ones left

to have other children'. Very graciously they did not respond to his words, but even if they had had ten children, the loss of that one would have been just as great.'

Surely we have to seek to enter into the pain of the grieving parents. Do you remember what we learned about 'empathy' in an earlier article in this series?

It is important that we do not run away from someone's pain...but stay with them and allow them to grieve

behind but bringing also real peace and thanksgiving.

A child's illness

But what about the child who is dying? She may be the same age as your own child or grandchild and therefore you immediately identify with the pain and sorrow of the parents. I remember the parents of little 5 year old Graham telling me after his death that he had looked up at his father one morning in church as the minister had announced the death of an elderly member of the church, and said, 'That's the third person I'll know when I get to heaven'. A week later Graham was being buried. Graham's parents had not told him how ill he was but he himself knew!

Another child I knew was sent to Sunday school each week, though his parents did not go to church. The night of his death in hospital he told his mother that he could see Jesus standing at the end of his bed. Yes, in a very special way God does care for and comfort his lambs.

Grieving parents

How do we handle the grief of the parents who have lost their child? Not I hope like one minister of a couple I knew whose 7 year old had a brain tumour. Shortly after her death, while trying to bring some comfort to them he said, 'At least you are young enough

The need for sensitivity

Whether we are visiting the ill or the bereaved, it is important to remember that the person may be easily exhausted. More, they may have had a ceaseless flow of visitors. Patients can pull themselves together for a visitor but leave themselves quite drained when the visitor leaves.

If visiting in hospital it is important to give the close relatives time to be alone with the sick person, if that is what they want. However, it may be that they do want you there as their pastor and friend. It calls for real sensitivity to be alert to the situation; there is no set rule and people differ in their needs. I have known patients who were longing for their minister to spend a little time with them, along with all the family. But they didn't want the minister to stay indefinitely, just long enough to bring spiritual comfort and strength through reading and prayer. Yet ministers have stayed on and on, when the family really wanted to be alone with their loved one. We must learn to understand and recognise our place; it is a spiritual gift to have the discernment to know when to stay and when to go.

Bereavement

Bereavement is not a disaster for the Christian. See John 17:24. Roy Castle when asked what had been his finest hour said he felt it had not yet come;

he thought it would be his last if when it came he could look back and smile!

However, we must recognise it is only natural to mourn. Jesus himself wept at the death of a close friend. Feelings of loss and grief at physical departure can be very painful. It is important that we do not run away from someone's pain, but stay with them and allow them to grieve without our becoming embarrassed. If we understand that grief must be expressed, and that those expressing their grief still need loving support, embarrassment will not cause us to be emotionally immobilised. We will be able to give the support that is so urgently needed.

Remember that feelings of grief can go on for months after death. Sometimes people fall away from their visiting after the first few weeks and outwardly the bereaved person appear to be 'coping well'. But what is happening indoors, away from the company of others? Do we take time to find out the real situation? It takes a little time, a few simple questions and the willingness to listen and pick up the hints that may be given in the replies.

Practical support

For some who say, 'But I could never do pastoral visiting!' this is the ideal opportunity for practical help. What about leaving a casserole for tea time at a home where there is trouble, or offering to do the ironing or care for the children? Ministers should not be expected to give all the support that is needed single-handed. There are always members of the congregation who can be encouraged to play an important role in the support of those undergoing bereavement and the trauma of serious illness in the family.

It is important that we don't just say, 'Do get in touch, and let me know if I can do anything!' It needs gentle, unobtrusive and practical help, without fuss or flag-waving, and without any expectation whatsoever of recognition or thanks. Situations arise which present unexpected opportunities for loving support from the fellowship. For

example, I have known a situation where a distraught wife had an accident while going to see her husband in hospital. Someone from her church could have been recruited to be a chauffeur one or two evenings to remove a little of the pressure of driving.

Separation and Divorce

While we can never condone the break-up of a marriage, we cannot deny that it occurs all too often and can cause tremendous heartache, with deep repercussions felt by not only the couple, but especially by the children and (often overlooked) by grandparents too. There are few churches today that do not have within their congregation some who are having marital disharmony. I would go as far to say that we perhaps do not know our church congregation very well if we do not acknowledge this!

Divorce can, I believe, be more painful than bereavement and therefore it can be important to spend much time with either husband or wife or both. I myself have recently had close contact with a marriage where there is a lot of heartache. Both parties are fully aware of my views and respect them without me ever having expressed them explicitly. Nevertheless they continue to talk openly to me of their problems, and appear to appreciate the support I have tried to offer. The point I am making is that one does not in any way need to compromise one's own position on the Biblical view of marriage in order to provide understanding, a listening ear and the support desperately needed in a time of crisis.

A word of warning in dealing with marital disharmony. It is all too easy to be caught into a web in the broken relationship, especially if dealing with the opposite sex. When the victim of a broken marriage is vulnerable and is receiving understanding from a counsellor or pastor, it is possible this can lead to misinterpretation of the counsellor's sympathetic attitude—or worse! It is possibly naive to say 'I would never let this happen to me!'. 'If you think

you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall' (1 Cor. 10:12). I know one minister whose wife some-times accompanies him while he talks to the female in the situation of a marital problem. A wise course of action, I assure you.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality—does it make you recoil? The secular media would give the message that all homosexuals are committed to a 'gay' identity and are therefore involved in homosexual genital activity. This is most certainly not the case. Many such people are deeply uncomfortable; many long for and need the support of a church fellowship.

What, therefore, do we do? Do we leave them to someone else? That someone may not exist! As a consequence, the person with the homosexual orientation may become marginalised, leading to a turning in the wrong direction and the search for understanding and acceptance among those who will lead him or her into a gay or lesbian lifestyle!

Family life is of immense importance for the homosexual. Are we willing to allow him or her into our home to share our family lives, or even our holidays? As we gain their confidence give permission for them to

scientific statement and research has never proved the case. I recently dealt with a young man who had cancer and also had a homosexual relationship (for which he did not wish to have help). He had been married and was the father of a teenager, but as we talked it emerged that he had been sexually abused as a nine year old and so at an early age had been seduced into homosexuality when his own primary orientation was heterosexual. I believe that man is typical of an increasing number of practising homosexuals who have been led astray in their early years and are perfectly capable of the normal relationship with the opposite sex for which God created us.

Aids

What about the disease of AIDS? Yes, this is something which will probably become known among members of our churches in our life time. Certainly we cannot deny it is a pressing problem in modern society. Whether resulting from the use of a dirty needle, homosexual practice, infidelity in heterosexual relationships or through infected parents passing it on to their child, it is something that we may well meet in our pastoral work.

It is so easy for us to look at sin and act in accordance with how we view and grade sin. Beware! It may well be

What greater reward can we have than to see someone...responding to God's love?

discuss with us their fears of sexual deviance this will only be done as they feel relaxed in our company and know they can completely trust our confidence.

Contrary to so much modern propaganda, change is possible for some homosexuals of both sexes. While help should be given where possible by someone of the same sex, it must certainly be given in a non-sexual way.

It is often said that homosexuals are 'born that way', but this is not a

time for ministers and church leaders to familiarise themselves with some facts. There are many Christian books available to help us on this subject such as *Truth about Aids* by Patrick Dixon recommended by the British Medical Association.

Sexual abuse

Another issue frequently on the media and one we can't afford to push under the carpet is that of sexual abuse. It is

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Problem Visiting CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

worth taking careful steps to advise those working with children and young people of some of the ground rules. Organisations such as Scripture Union can help clarify some of these with their experience in dealing with camp officers and other children's workers at sea side and parish missions. While one must guard against naivety in this issue (it is undoubtedly true that because child abuse has been given so much media attention many are falsely claiming to have been abused as children), we must also be prepared to take this problem seriously and equip ourselves so as to be prepared should this difficult problem cross our paths.

Those adults who have been abused as children may require very loving and careful assistance. The greatest specialist help I can offer is in the shape of Dr Dan B Allender's book *The Wounded Heart—Hope for adult victims of childhood sexual abuse*, a CWR publication. A detailed and at times heavy book but an excellent text book for help on a difficult matter.

Non-judgmental attitudes

When we visit we are not in a court of law where judgment is right and proper. It is easy, however, to fall into the trap of judging. I often think of Jesus' example. He did not judge (in the sense of passing a verdict) or

condemn the woman who had committed adultery, but he did tell her very explicitly to leave her sin (John 8:3–11). When visiting someone, does our tone of voice suggest our disapproval? A person will quickly pick up such messages, may assume our rejection of them and that may result in their deciding not to come back to the church.

Listening

To recap, it is important that we allow ourselves time to achieve the art of listening, whatever 'baggage' the one being visited may begin to expose. Listening is not just, 'Sometimes I sits and thinks and sometimes I just sits'! The listener should be a participant, alive and alert with a sense of awareness, never obviously doing a time check or fidgeting on the edge of the chair, betraying a sense of feeling uncomfortable, hoping the visited will come to the point soon, so that an escape can be made! Listening is an art of wisdom and intuition. Often it is when nothing has been said by the visitor that the member or patient expresses appreciation for the help received.

Time is an important and rare commodity today. For many people to feel rushed will make them feel unwanted leading to a sense of being worthless or

valueless. This can lead to self-rejection, and no one is then allowed to become close to them. Such people can through the love and care of a faithful pastoral visitor begin to accept the Father-heart of God. It is often extremely difficult. Getting close to some can be difficult, and we may at first ourselves feel rejected by them. It is so easy to put the barriers up and refuse to let others in. This is normally because of a fear of being emotionally hurt—could it be because of deep hurts in the past?

What greater reward can we have than to see someone we have visited over possibly months or even years responding to God's love, God having given us the joy and privilege of playing a part in his plan and saying 'well done good and faithful servant'?

Some recommended reading:

A Grief Observed, C S Lewis
The Wounded Heart, Dan Allender
Love must be Tough, James Dobson
Explaining Rejection, Steve Hebden
When Heaven is Silent, Ronald Dunn
Truth about Aids, Patrick Dixon
Gone but not Lost: Grieving the Death of a Child, David W. Wiersbe

Liz Frost is a Social Worker and Counsellor in Belvoir Park Hospital, Belfast

Ann Allen meets

Who is Bill Wallace? A '121' mandarin? A member of Assembly Council? A parish minister? Convener of one of the largest boards of the Church of Scotland? A media spokesman? A regular contributor to the tabloid press? The husband of Jean and father of 4 children? The answer to all these questions is 'Yes!' All this from a man who as a minister's son had decided his future lay in dentistry.

Why swap dentistry for ministry Bill?

It wasn't until my final year as a dental student that I finally surrendered and committed my life to full time service of the Lord. But at that time I wasn't sure what form that service was to take.

So how did the Lord lead you into ministry?

I went to New College keeping myself solvent by doing some dentistry. That was followed by a 3 year assistantship at the Tron in Glasgow in the time of G. B. Duncan. At the end of that time I was sponsored by the Christian Dental Fellowship to work in Ethiopia for SIM. I was engaged in dental work and pastoring the International Church in Addis and that was a great 2 years. I suppose that could have resulted in further missionary service but God's call has always seemed unmistakably clear at crucial times in my life and I was left in no doubt by the Lord that I was called to work back in the Church in Scotland.



Had you any preconceptions about the type of parish you would be best suited to?

Brought up in a manse in Blochairn, a city lad, I expected God to call me to an urban charge. But absolutely out of the blue I was called to Wick. Me, who had never been further north than Lairg! So along with Jean and the children I went to what seemed the remotest corner of Scotland.

What did you find when you arrived in your parish?

I followed on two evangelical ministries to the linked charge of St Andrews and Thrumster so folk were well used to the gospel. I found a core of fine committed people and a large and flourishing Sunday School. The local culture is one where any change which affects family life and tradition is seen as a huge threat. So the dynamic changes the gospel can bring into peoples' lives can cause enormous

family resentments and upheavals. This may be true generally but I think is especially marked here in Caithness. 90% of the people in Wick claim a tenuous church connection but church attendance in Caithness, at 6% of the population, is way below the national average.

That start you made in ministry takes you back 21 years. How would you assess the development of your ministry over that span of time?

Let's say if there is a pattern it looks like this to me. In the first seven years I saw a slow and steady decline, for no obvious reason, and that was pretty discouraging. In the second seven years, a slow and steady advance and in the third seven, there has been radical change, both in the physical 'plant' (church buildings) and in the spiritual ethos of the church.

Were the changes precipitated by the union your congregation had with Wick Central five years ago?

That was a long and difficult period. There was no overall plan and there was a lot of suspicion and uncertainty generated in all the congregations concerned. Eventually the General Assembly instructed the presbytery to unite the congregations or dissolve Wick Central. The union took place and as unions go there have been a lot worse. We lost some people but we gained some excellent folk. However, the whole prolonged process created huge pastoral problems. Looking back

Bill Wallace

on the experience I would say in an ideal world where union is being implemented in congregations additional pastoral support in some form is necessary, maybe even over a period of two years.

With the union would come inevitable change, so did that help to make other changes more acceptable?

We had already begun a programme of upgrading our buildings. In Thrumster we have upgraded our premises so that the Church/hall unit is to all intents and purposes a multi purpose building. In Wick we have in Pulteneytown a new reception area, a comfortable lounge, office, and halls and we have altered the church internally to accommodate drama and other activities.

Some people would say that in itself is a minor miracle in an area where you say people resist change. What changes have you introduced to your style of ministry over the years?

We take seriously the statement from the Board of National Mission that any church, simply to stand still, needs to add by profession of faith three new members per every hundred of its congregation each year. That gives us a touchstone to see in practical terms whether we are adding to the kingdom of God and is an incentive for evangelism for the whole congregation. Then for years we had run a summer holiday club for children very successfully. Outside teams had come up and the work had gone extremely



well. I decided that our own folk needed to be stretched and that we should do this outreach ourselves and now about 50 of our congregation are involved in running our Summer Week. We have reached from 150 to 200 children in the age range 5 to 12 years. Half of them have no church connection at all and none virtually came to SS afterwards. That made us think. Why would they happily come to a Bible based holiday club but not to church?

We finish the holiday week with a festival of faith service on the last night. It was a tremendous shock to us when some teenagers hanging about outside said they had wanted to come in to the service but didn't know how to come into a church. We decided we had to make our services and worship accessible to youngsters like them if at all possible and from there we embarked on a course of developing all age worship.

What changes has that meant for the congregation and how has the congregation reacted?

We began by telling the congregation that after two months we would do a survey and they could tell us what they felt about the change in the worship format. After two months 78% of the 65+ age group were overwhelmingly in favour of the changes, 98% of the congregation felt young people would feel much happier and more comfortable in church and from nothing we had 25 young folk in church in a high school group.

So tell me what happens on a Sunday.

I meet with the Sunday School and youth leaders for 20 minutes before the morning service and explain to them the main points of the sermon. A 'think tank' group have already planned the components of the service. The first half of the service will vary. We try to be different every week. Quizzes, drama, poetry, dialogue, visual aids, rap, monologue, interview...whatever communicates relevantly the theme of the sermon. Then half way through all the young people leave to explore further that theme in biblical terms geared to their age groups and the adults get a 20-25 minute sermon. The evening service continues in a much more traditional format.

What have been the results of presenting the worship and teaching in such modern ways?

Surprising, but most satisfying is the fact that most folk say their Bible knowledge and understanding has increased over these last 2 years. It has certainly encouraged and developed the gifts of folk in the congregation because obviously quite a number of them are involved up front Sunday by Sunday and participate in the planning. Keeping it fresh and continuing to develop the all age learning process is a constant challenge. My assessment is that it's been good for the whole congregation.

Not content with all of that change eighteen months ago you accepted the convenership of the Board of Social Responsibility of the Church of Scotland with which you have had a long association. I'd have thought with your experience of Ethiopia that World Mission and its work would have been the Board to attract you. Why S.R.?

When I first went to Wick, I felt that if I did not become involved in concerns outwith my immediate parish responsibilities, I'd become far too insular and isolated. Almost by default I was elected chair of the Local Health Council. I also became involved in the School Council and these opportunities of service gave me invaluable links in the community and my first taste of handling the media on a small scale.

One night in my absence I was nominated Presbytery representative

for Social Responsibility and so my beginnings there were extremely inauspicious. However my upbringing in a parish of deprivation had left me with tremendous concerns for the underprivileged and weak in society so it was not difficult to take the work of the Board to my heart.

You have become quite a media Guru earning yourself tremendous opportunities in the tabloids, the serious press, TV and radio, to express a Christian viewpoint on many ethical issues. Did you ever see yourself in that role?

No, never. I never dreamed I would ever be Convener of Social Responsibility, especially because I am geographically so remote from the central belt. But fax and phone bridge the gap pretty well. The secular press use me because they see me as a church figure who will speak clearly, sincerely, and in their terms, controversially. Moral and ethical issues are becoming part of news output in the media rather than being hived off into a religious slot and this gives scope for Christians locally and nationally to give a clear biblical response.

So you didn't specially feel you had gifts for 'media' work?

I don't think I'm given much to self analysis. I see my calling as to serve the Lord in every situation by teaching the truths of scripture and if I'd stopped to wonder if I had special gifts for all the media and board work I'd probably have taken cold feet and never have done it.

Do you feel embattled when you are continually put in a 'defender of the faith' position?

No, I don't ever feel that because I am fully convinced that the positions I hold are biblical and therefore true. I have a simple three pronged attack. I state the Christian position, back it up from the Bible and church history and then say why it is best for society today. I am horrified that the punter in the street does not know what is the Christian position because all the media hype is normally given to vocal minority views in the church which do not represent mainstream Christianity. That's precisely what happened in the sexuality debate. Joe Bloggs thinks that the Church no longer stands for anything because the media continually gives oxygen to radical minority views. I thrive on the interaction between the church and the outside world. I suppose that I enjoy committee work where things do result from the talk. It's about actively being salt and light in society and the terrific work of the Board in its study groups and practical work gives flesh to that.

So what next for Bill Wallace? It would be a fool who would try to predict the future career of this man who plays many parts and does so graciously, expertly and willingly for the Lord. He himself says, 'I'm delighted to stay, happy to move, concerned only to be where the Lord wants me.' The national Church has cause to give thanks to God for Bill Wallace.

What shall we Sing?

Christopher Idle

Let's assume that we *shall* sing when we meet together, and that we know what singing is—noting merely that both questions have been keenly debated by evangelical Christians in the past. At a time when more musical material than ever is urged upon us, this is neither a guide to the 'Best Buy' in hymnals, nor a chart of the current Top 20 spiritual songs. I offer simply a sketch of what to look for, whatever the style, source or scope.

Sing Scripture

Few would doubt that; it is itself a Biblical habit. That is, the Law is sung in the Psalms, the Psalms in the Gospels, and so on. One problem: strictly translated, Scripture does not meet the rhythmic and rhyming expectations of most western singing. So we paraphrase, either in strict metrical forms or more freely but still Biblically rooted. Or we chant, as in cathedrals (but do they get the *message*?)—or learn flexi-music that wraps itself round speech-rhythm. If the Psalm titles are to be believed, as Derek Kidner claims, tunes may be borrowed from secular sources but should reflect the mood, style, and stress of the original rather than obscure, change or dominate it. It may be healthier when the church makes the musical running and the world parodies our hymns. AV and GNB have been well-explored in song; what about more which grow

from the NIV?

Sing truth

In a young Christian's extempore prayer we excuse exaggeration or over-personal piety; but printed words for a congregation need more care—in hymn and song as in creed and collect.

*Let us be occupied above
all with God himself
living, eternal, creating,
sustaining, redeeming,
holy and sovereign*

Don't sing what isn't true—attributing to God words he never uttered or asking others to sing what they should not. Old phrases sometimes do it; new ones often. But suppose the author *meant* something off-beam—may we use the words in *our* sense with a clear conscience? Take each on its merits; borderline cases could be 'Praise to the Holiest' (sacramentalist), 'Restore, O Lord' (restorationist) or 'Dear Lord and Father' (in its original setting, aggressively sectarian!). But if just one stanza offends, leave it out.

Sing sense

My problem with some modern songs is that I don't know what they actually mean. Let's get the grammar right and the sense clear; if it's not clear don't assume it's your fault—it may not be true either. Only sing Latin (from Taizé), Greek (the Kyries) or Hebrew (very trendy) if *everyone* understands it. The same goes for some archaically obscure hymns—but Watts and Wesley are clearer than some of their successors.

Sing new

Singing new songs is Biblical; the Psalms repeatedly urge us to innovate. New items should be genuinely new, and not a creaking chain of clichés. Don't perpetuate Tudor language, reflecting tradition rather than Scripture; gifted writers of every generation have looked for new ways of celebrating eternal truth. Our minds need to be stretched, not blown; so feed new things in carefully, and don't stuff every service with novelty.

Sing old

The only thing worse than a narrow round of old favourites is a narrow round of new ones. To turn our backs on the past is as much a delusion in our singing as in other areas of church life; it is not given to us to wipe out history and start again. Let's value past treasures by using them, not locking them in the

museum. We may even learn something; a recent viewer of 'Songs of Praise' noted the glazed eyes of those who sang choruses, which suddenly sprang to life as they encountered a Charles Wesley hymn.

Sing together

Our hymns and songs should not highlight the private idiosyncrasies of the writer or composer, nor revel in their individual experiences. Hymns are smaller than poetry in range, but greater in their value—because they are for all. Of course there are some (like the Psalms) in the first person singular, and some which are valued for a limited range of occasions. But afterwards we should find ourselves exclaiming, not 'What a great writer!' (or musician/choir/composer) but 'How great is our God!'

Sing to God

So Paul the apostle tells us; so David the king shows us. Many of today's songs pay the devil inordinate attention (which he no doubt enjoys); let us be occupied above all with God himself living, eternal, creating, sustaining, redeeming, holy, and sovereign. If we recall who it is to whom we sing, our standards will rise all round; who speaks to royalty in shoddy, sloppy or slovenly fashion?

Sing to Christ

Follow those early 2nd century believ-

ers (described in Pliny the Younger's letter to the emperor Trajan) who met in the morning to sing a hymn to Christ as to God. Anticipate heaven in singing of his cross. Again, contemporary songs reflect new teaching, preaching and liturgy where Calvary is squeezed out by other topics, and the atonement by alternative remedies. This year one friend said that to find a short, simple item for Good Friday, expressing why Christ died, he had to go back to the old CSSM choruses. Many of our generation seem to have different interests.

Sing to one another

More exhortations from Ephesians and Colossians! Isaac Watts followed them in his model 'Come, let us join our cheerful songs', in the grand 'Venite' tradition (Psalm 95). Hymns have room for reflection, testimony, encouragement and rebuke, as well as penitence, praise and prayer addressed directly to God. But hymns should not be sermons, if they are to be used more than once; and like the Psalms we must get the balance right, and not spend our time looking inwards.

Sing, and sing again

Good things bear repetition; Scripture is our pattern here again. But repetition is not the mindless working up of a mood or atmosphere; where the Bible (and the best hymns) repeat, they also move us on. Study Psalm 136 and

what Watts does with it in 'Give to our God immortal praise'.

But don't sing everything

I would personally want to stop short of singing the creed or 'Our Father...'; is this a matter of taste alone? Some words seem to gain power from being sung, but others lose it. And those who cannot sing well aloud must not be marginalised by the musical. Be on your guard against a musical takeover, ending with the praise of praise and the worship of worship.

...and don't sing forever!

More than one true revival has trickled away somehow in the songs that flowed from it. Endless singing is neither edifying nor true praise, but self-indulgence. 'Take away the noise of your songs', says the Lord when other things are left undone. Psalm 95 again: Come and sing...then stop singing; bow down and listen. Songs are a privilege in easier times, and especially precious in days of suffering; but in the last resort we can get by without them. God can live without our words; we cannot live without his. Never let our singing drown the music of the Gospel!

Christopher Idle has been in the Anglican ministry for 30 years in both rural and urban parishes. He is a well known hymn writer.

Book Reviews

The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind

Mark A Noll

London, IVP, 1994, 274pp

ISBN 0 85111 148 3

This clearly written book is more than an able historical analysis of the relation of a sub-culture to the culture surrounding it. This is a valuable contribution to debate within the evangelical community and a clear call to evangelical recovery of confidence and constructive contribution to the debates in the world in which we are supposed to shine as lights.

Mark Noll's thesis is that the intellectual life of contemporary evangelicalism in the USA is best understood as a set of intellectual assumptions emerging from the nineteenth century synthesis of American and Protestant values filtered through the intellectual disaster of fundamentalism. The result is, as he remarks in the opening sentence of the book, 'The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.' His plaint is that evangelicalism is marked by intuitionism, the rapid movement from first impressions to final conclusions, bypassing considered reflection. This is most clearly seen in evangelical reaction to political and moral questions, we come across a problem, know from gut feeling that something is wrong, and react to the situation. Analysis appears to be missing from the evangelical repertoire.

Giving particular attention to the fields of political activity and science this book offers a penetrating survey of the historical process of cultural synthesis whereby evangelical Protestantism has moved from shaping a culture in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to being shaped by the rapidly changing culture of the twenty-first. Noll argues with passion and scholarship that if evangelicals today wish to challenge instead of reflect the culture of our day we must recover a lost tradition of serving God with the mind.

Although firmly set within the North American context there are many lessons to be learnt for the

divergent evangelical streams in the nations of the UK. The main thrust of Noll's argument is that if evangelicals are to develop the life of the mind in whatever field they practice they must move beyond intuitionism to painstaking and thorough examination of the hard questions which confront us in the societies in which we live.

The point of Christian scholarship is not to gain recognition from the within the structures of our society but to praise God with the mind. Seen in this fashion careful thought is not only a task for those called to labour in intellectual fields, it is a duty for all evangelicals at whatever level we operate. The effort to think as a Christian is the effort to take seriously the sovereignty of God over the world he created, the lordship of Christ over the world he died to redeem, and the oversight of the Holy Spirit over the world he sustains.

Review Editor

Mummy, why have I got Down's Syndrome?

Caroline Philps

Oxford, Lion Publishing, 1991, 159pp, £4.99

ISBN 0 7459 1921 9

In this sensitively written book Caroline Philps portrays the life of her daughter who has Down's Syndrome within the context of her growing family. Honest and deeply personal, Caroline gives a moving account of the pain and joy of having a Down's baby and of her development through to school age. As a father with a daughter of comparable age to Lizzie who also has Down's I find Caroline's experiences uncannily similar to my own. Many of the questions relating to life with a handicapped child that people fear to ask are answered.

This book, however, is not simply about a girl with a handicap. It is an exploration of uncompromising love and acceptance, and also of rejection and abandonment. Experiences we have sometimes complicated or simplified by our Christian faith. Greater than the affliction of being rejected is the affliction of rejecting someone.

This reveals a terrible sickness of the heart.

The book offers a valuable guide and support to families with handicapped children or adults. Opening with a clear explanation of what Down's Syndrome is this book is well referenced with a detailed appendix and includes contacts, educational material and associations the author found of particular use.

Congregations and leadership will find this book stimulating. Loving, respecting or honouring people has to be learned. Our values have to be questioned and changed—and this is difficult. So too do our lives with Christ. So much of our treatment of handicapped and disadvantaged people does not honour them. We may do this out of ignorance or fear, but we have also done it because they cannot answer back. This book deserves to be well circulated and read. The story of Caroline and Lizzie is one of hope for every reader.

Jim Smillie, Kilmuir, Ross-shire

One Heart and One Soul

Michael Haykin

Durham, Evangelical Press, 1994, 431pp

For too many, 18th Century evangelical Christianity means the Wesleys and Whitefield. There were however, other evangelical leaders and ministers. So it is real joy to have this book which covers the story of John Sutcliffe, minister of the Baptist Church in Olney at the same time that John Newton was rector.

We are indebted to Professor Haykin who by his conscientious distillation of primary sources, including Sutcliffe's own writing, has given the reader a fuller insight into 18th century evangelical ministry, in a different but supporting sphere to that of Toplady, Romaine and Newton with whom Sutcliffe had a close friendship.

Apart from describing characters and the influence of the men who surrounded Sutcliffe, the book sheds light on other matters such as the formation of the Baptist Missionary

Society, who sent William Carey and his fellow workers to India. The relationship between Calvinistic Baptists and the evangelical Anglicans in the 18th and early 19th centuries is explored. The importance of Jonathan Edwards' writings to the Baptists is also discussed as is the work of Andrew Fuller's.

It is interesting to read of a settled pastoral ministry over a number of years, which included the teaching of candidates for the ministry and evangelistic and missionary concern, all based on the preaching of the Word and prayer.

There are some real gems to discover in this book, not least the story of the conversion of William Carey's son as a result of public prayer. For the scholar and the general reader this is a book rich in information, as well as historical, theological and spiritual insight.

Peter Rae, Cowdenbeath

Four Gospels, One Jesus?

Richard A Burridge
London, SPCK, 1994, 191 pp, £7.99
ISBN 0 281 047780 4

Throughout life we encounter people in many different circumstances. If these were to share their vast range of anecdotes and experiences the complete stranger would gain a full picture of our lives. Similarly, Burridge argues, the gospel authors have given to the church a many faceted understanding of Christ.

This study condenses large areas of scholarship in an attractive and palatable presentation. Applying to Christ the four traditional symbols for the gospels—Matthew the human teacher, Mark the roaring lion; Luke the burden bearing ox; John the high flying eagle—Burridge shows how the background and purpose of the authors shaped their writing. The distinctive of each gospel are outlines, yet the con-vincing conclusion is that we have four consistent portraits of the same Lord.

One aspect leads to concern, the assertion that in these 'interpretative biographies' the authors recorded

events and words which may not have happened quite as reported. Many will conclude that the implications of this position lead to an undermining of the authority of the gospels. These records depend upon historical accuracy as well as spiritual, moral and philosophical truth.

With this one important caution I thoroughly recommend this book and will use it as I continue preaching the gospels. It is full of insight and seed thoughts. It is marked by an emphasis that study must lead to faith and devotion. Anyone who loves the gospels will delight in it.

Peter Fleming, Lifford, Co. Donegal

Brushing up on Believing: A Fresh Look at Basic Christianity and Prayer

Sheila Brown and Gavin Reid
Oxford, Bible Reading Fellowship,
1994, 128pp, £4.99
ISBN 0 7459 2929 9

This most attractively produced offering for the Decade of Evangelism contains a lot to help newer Christians or those seeking to brush up on essentials. In two parts, the book has six chapters on basic doctrines and six on the Lord's Prayer. There are helpful illustrations by Taffy. Designed equally for group or individual study, group material, prayers and meditations are to be found at the end of each chapter. It complements another book by the authors, *Lights that Shine*, on evangelism.

The intention has been to give the book a popular style accessible to a wide variety of people. In this, I suspect, it has partially failed. The flavour here is middle-class, evangelical Anglican. Many will feel at home with the likes of Kermit the Frog and James Heriot, but it is assumed that the reader is comfortable with a world populated by such as Toulouse Lautrec, CS Lewis and Leonard Bernstein. One esoteric illustration begins: 'A university professor was about to preach the annual Bedmakers' Sermon to the college servants...'

The people who are going to be helped by this are graduates and those

who read quality newspapers. That is a pity, because the content is excellent.

David Sladden, Huntingdon

Whose promised Land?

Colin Chapman
Oxford, Lion Publishing, 3rd revision,
1992, 287pp, £5.99
ISBN 0 7459 2408 5

This book, since its first edition in 1983, has had an enormous influence on Christians who are concerned about the issue of the biblical significance, or otherwise, of the establishment of the state of Israel. Chapman acknowledges in his preface that his views have not changed in the meantime. When this is coupled with the fact that Chapman finished this manuscript before the impact of the 1993 Israel-PLO agreement, I am forced to advise those who have an earlier edition to wait until the fourth revision before buying the book.

Chapman's work is summarily dismissed by certain types of Christian Zionist, and applauded somewhat naively by opponents of Zionism. In both cases not enough critical reflection is brought to bear. He forces a mature, biblical, and thoroughly Christian engagement with the issues, although he is as guilty as any of having his own agenda. His passionate commitment to our Palestinian Christian brothers and sisters is exemplary. Sadly, his lack of appreciation of the theological perspective of our Messianic Jewish brothers and sisters, especially in Israel, is still notable.

Dr Walter Riggans, St Albans

Deserted By God?

Sinclair B Ferguson
Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1993.
182pp.
ISBN 0 8010 3563 5

Some modern approaches to depression, even when they purport to be theological, pay scant attention to the deeper spiritual dimensions and even less attention to what the Scriptures may have to say on the subject. Often, the basic framework is provided by psychology's 'state of the art' theory which is currently in vogue. There

may be some reference to religion here and there, but it is rare to find much depth of biblical faith and understanding. Into this rather unpromising situation. Ferguson's contribution—faithful to Scripture (based on the teaching of the Psalms) and relevant to real-life situations—comes like an oasis in the desert.

Ferguson's approach is not negative, to expose the weaknesses in contemporary psychological approaches. His concern is positive, to lead the reader to Christ whose 'voice will be heard saying, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"'. Two basic principles emerge: 'Speak to God about your problems', and 'Let God speak to you about his provision.'

The most impressive feature of these pastoral expositions of Scripture is the God centredness. Ferguson leads the reader beyond a variety of approaches which are insufficiently centred upon God and his Word. Highlighted are the inadequacies of approaches which: soft pedal sin and guilt; look for short cuts which do not take account of the realities of the situation; accept the imbalances of prosperity theology; are in such a hurry that they give up when things don't go as well as hoped for; and, which divorce the search for happiness from the pursuit of holiness.

This book can be highly recommended as one which presents the biblical remedy for depression, 'there are reasons for being discouraged; *but there are better and stronger reasons for being encouraged.*'

Dr Charles M Cameron, Dunfermline

The Communicator's Craft

James Rye

Leicester, IVP, 1990, 156pp, £6.50

ISBN 0 85110 689 7

This is not a technical manual but a guide to communication which contains a good deal of sound, practical advice. Its author is a lay pastor who also lectures in English and Communication Studies. From the outset he emphasises that communication techniques do not equate with spiritual effectiveness, but we are called to be

like God who is the most skilful communicator. In addition, considering that Christians have the best message for people, we should ensure that it is heard clearly, understood correctly and obeyed consistently.

In a series of chapters he deals with the importance of structure in presenting a message and how to relate material to the daily lives of hearers. Her makes a strong plea for the modernisation of religious language. Attention is drawn to the non-verbal communication of both individuals and churches. Small group communication and communicating with authority are also dealt with. Most chapters conclude with a section entitled 'Things to do' which contains suggestions for practical follow-up.

This volume is not just for preachers but for anyone concerned that people hear, remember, learn and respond to the message they declare. This is particularly relevant for those facing the challenge of bringing that message to a society which is increasingly ignorant of the Bible.

Dr John Lockington, Larne, Co. Antrim

Mastering Contemporary Preaching

Bill Hybels, Stuart Briscoe and Haddon Robinson

Leicester, IVP, reprinted 1992, 171pp, £7.50

ISBN 0 85110 954 3

This is a book concerned with improving and refining the skills of preachers in an increasingly pluralist and secular environment. The authors, each of whom provide individual chapters in the four sections of the book, are well known and respected Bible teachers ministering in America. As such it is a book written for those engaged in a preaching ministry by preachers on the craft of preaching. The empathy which the authors have for their reader's concerns is evident throughout.

The book's four parts 'Today's Audience', 'Today's Preaching Task', 'Today's Toughest Topics' and 'Today's Preacher' show an appreciation that preaching as an effective means of

communicating the Good News of Jesus Christ in today's world needs honest effort and responsible evaluation. Do preachers understand the mind of their audience? Do they answer biblically the questions that congregations are asking? Or do we work to ill-researched agendas using worn out techniques and tired or second-hand illustrations?

Advice on planning sermon series, on the judicious use of personal illustrations, on the temptation to raise ourselves rather than Christ from the pulpit: it is all here in an easily accessible and readable package. Anyone who takes their teaching ministry seriously, and who wants stimulus in refining it further, will find this little book a helpful and challenging contribution.

Gary Renison, Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire

In the Steps of Timothy

Lance Pierson

Leicester, IVP, 1995, 280pp

ISBN 0 85110 977 7

Lance Pierson points out that biographies of Timothy only appear about once every thousand years, his being only the third. Yet as Pierson shows, Timothy is really a very important person, Paul's right hand man for much of his missionary ministry.

This biography is aimed at ordinary Christians who perhaps feel that their contribution can only be small and limited. Timothy was an ordinary Christian who, when we peek behind the scenes was very influential in the advance of the early Church and the work of Paul. There is much in Timothy's story to encourage us.

Encouragement, therefore, as much as illumination of Timothy's life, is the book's aim. That aim is furthered by the two sections at the end of each of the nine chapters, the first with questions for personal reflection, and the second with questions for group discussion. These sections are preceded by a selection of relevant Scripture passages. Bible study groups could profitably read and discuss this book.

Klaus Buwert, Kinlochleven